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Flora J. Arnstein

ONGOING: POETRY, TEACHING, FAMILY IN SAN FRANCISCO, 1885-1985

With an Introduction by  
Shirley Kaufman

An Interview Conducted by  
Suzanne B. Riess  
1984-1985

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FLORA JACOBI ARNSTEIN

Portrait of Flora Jacobi Arnstein painted by Olga Ackerman

*Photograph by Suzanne B. Riess, May 1985*



## COMMUNION

UT of the sum of hours, days and years,  
Out of the past of joy and pain and fears,  
Out of the jumble of our fruitless lives,  
Some consecrated moments *do* arise;  
Some instant when the gulf that yawns between  
The lonely souls that people our demesne,  
Is magically bridged, and from the eyes  
A current of supreme awareness flies;  
And for the span of one short moment's life,  
Is born a something, living, vivid—rife  
With beauty and with love, all wonder-given,  
That makes our earth more glorified than heaven.

from *A Legacy of Hours*, Grabhorn Press



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## INTRODUCTION

Twenty years seems like a good stretch of time to have known someone as a friend, but it's only a fifth of Flora Arnstein's life. I met Forgie when she was 79 and I was 40, both of us students in the English Department at San Francisco State, and we immediately liked each other. Perhaps she saw in me something of herself at my age--a late-blooming poet, a mother who raised her daughters as she had before embarking on her own creative life. I saw in her a lively, quick, curious, and sensitive woman, a perennial student, as young in spirit and in ideas as any of my contemporaries. But her wisdom and life experience, and especially her empathy, set her apart. We studied together, attended graduate writing workshops, shared our alternating delight and outrage, as we shared our poems, and discovered we had even struggled through the same writing workshop at U.C. Extension earlier in our careers, though at separate times, grinding out the same exercises in imagery and "sensory reporting."

Throughout the first year of our friendship I never thought of Forgie as twice my age. But she forced me to think of this at the end of the term in a literature class where we were required to take a two-hour final bluebook exam. "Do you think Dr. Wiseman might let me do a take-home exam this time since it's almost my eightieth birthday?" she asked me. With her usual wit and good humor, she wondered whether her memory might be indulged a bit since it was not quite as reliable as it had been up to then.

But even her reminding me--and Dr. Richard Wiseman--that she was 80 didn't help me to believe all those years had accumulated in Forgie. It was impossible in 1965. And it's impossible now as she celebrates her 100th birthday twenty years later.

I have lived in Israel since 1973, and been privileged to correspond with Forgie for twelve years now. (Though not at all privileged to be deprived of our regular face-to-face meetings, except on my brief visits to San Francisco to visit my daughters once or twice a year.) We have sent each other poems all this time, and I have cherished this exchange though Forgie's prolific output puts me to shame. In recent years she has been writing a poem a day in addition to prose sketches and reminiscences, and her letters come with sheets of poems, which reveal her remarkable vision and gift of language as she looks outward and inward. There is something amazing in the forthright way she contemplates her mortality. When we do meet, each time I walk through the gate of her primrose-edged garden, I discover the same wise friend standing at the door. Time seems to have stood still, or to have hovered over her benevolently during each absence. We have tea and Forgie reads me her recent poems in the same clear and lilting voice I first heard when she was a young eighty. I have begun to think of Forgie as immortal.

She has also become a link for me with one of my daughters who slipped into her own special relationship with Forgie when I moved to Jerusalem. Almost as if Forgie were standing in for me as poet/mother, in my own generation, the years--again--of no consequence. Now Sharon brings her daughter and small son to visit, and Forgie writes me a full report about my clever grandchildren. Thousands of miles away I share their delight in each other, the elegant small tea tray Forgie prepares for my granddaughter Sarah, with her own little china tea service, and the magic cabinet in the living room from which all the children who come to visit Forgie may pick one very special toy at a time to play with.

I was lucky enough to be in San Francisco for Forgie's 95th birthday--a highlight of my own life. I understood more fully than ever how much she has meant to the lives of the many young people she has taught when I saw her surrounded by her grandchildren and great grandchildren at her daughter's home. She had come through very deep and painful family losses with courage and renewed vitality, and all her energy seemed to be focused on giving and sharing her very rare understanding and compassion for others. The testimony of her family who returned her love that evening in heartfelt brief speeches was something I shall never forget.

I will miss Forgie's 100th birthday celebration, but hope I can be present for the 101st. In the meantime I will read again and again the poem she wrote and gave my husband and me the day of our most recent visit to San Francisco, June 24, 1985:

How I rejoice  
                                   in everything around me:  
 My circular glass stairway,  
 My tiers of books,  
 The very rug I walk on.

It is as though with age  
 I had been given new eyes,  
 And all the common-place  
 Turns special.

Colors are pennants,  
 Curtains, golden gauze,  
 The knobs of doors  
 Shape to my hands.

All rivals all in giving.

How we rejoice in Forgie, the blessing of her friendship.

Shirley Kaufman

July 1985  
 Jerusalem, Israel

## INTERVIEW HISTORY

Flora Jacobi Arnstein, poet and teacher, was born in 1885. Ninety-nine years later the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library turned on the tape recorder to get into oral history form some of the thoughts and theories and family reminiscences and instructive life anecdotes of the redoubtable and charming Mrs. Arnstein. Strong-minded individual; open to new ideas and flexible in response to the invasive world out there; forgetter and scorner of dates, but never of students and friends; challenging and forgiving, she has been someone to reckon with for a long lifetime.

About all that longevity--and a question not asked was, "To what do you attribute your long life?"--one theory might be that the somewhat reluctant emergence from childhood--witness No End to Morning--and her self-confessed lengthy approach to full adult identity, and then her present quest for insight have doubled this woman's life. And in the course of it doubled and blessed the number of people who have been around to enjoy it.

My first meeting with Flora Arnstein was scheduled for morning at her home in Parnassus Heights, San Francisco to which I had been given excellent driving directions by Mrs. Arnstein. She was seated on a sofa in the living room, her daughter Edith by her side. I was expecting a "getting to know you" session; Mrs. Arnstein was expecting a thought-provoking interview. The misunderstanding made for a haphazard first session, but we managed, and we enjoyed each other. When Mrs. Arnstein stood up to bid me farewell I realized how small she was, not shrunken, but petite. Later in meetings she would bend over her bookshelves to hoist up a load of printed matter for me, and it was hard to respect her refusal of assistance. But although I was twice her size, she was twice my age, and twice as clear about what she could and would do.

The interview sessions, which were from then on just the two of us, always had an urgent feeling: get the machine plugged in, do some necessary small talk, get "set," Go! Often I received, as conduit, items destined for the Flora Jacobi Arnstein collection in The Bancroft Library. We would conclude as Mrs. Arnstein was to be served lunch, and she would ascend to her writing corner upstairs. Her day was a reasonable one of early rising, creative working morning, lunch, nap, and afternoon visitors.

As the interviews proceeded, I received from Mrs. Arnstein more of her writings, unpublished family life stories and "vignettes" as background reading. I was given an opportunity in succeeding weeks to get closer and closer to the life of my subject. And interestingly, as each week passed Mrs. Arnstein herself seemed closer to an understanding of what the life had been about. The death of her husband Lawrence ("Lawrie") in 1979 brought emptiness, but also time to devote to herself. Stimulated by her journal-



keeping approach to gerontology and her "elderly group" and her continuing search for self-knowledge in association with a psychiatrist friend, she was in an open and growing frame of mind.

Mrs. Arnstein was also in a hurry, once the interviewing was over, to see the process through, to get a transcript to edit. She did an exceptional job of close editing, as well as essential urging of the interviewer to better structure the completed opus. The transcript initially reflected the fact that material was repeated and that the interview sessions looped back and over topics several times. Not to remove these repeats was only laziness on my part, she may have felt. I had to agree. I became the accompanist, or page turner, even, to a very satisfying performance by a pro--a professional writer, and a professional as well in getting the best out of other writers, and in getting her way.

The editing, I am saying, was extensive to remove repeated material, and on Mrs. Arnstein's part to replace indefinite nouns and shopworn "things" with high-quality descriptive, definite nouns. The changes were not major, but they represented admirable understanding of nuance of word, at the same time honoring the oral history dictum of retaining the conversational and informal.

The index to this oral history is an index to names, not a refined breaking down of Mrs. Arnstein's chronology and work and thoughts on education, or children, creativity, isolation, sorrow, change, loss, love, religion, politics, etc. The latter would verge on the presumptuous, and would falsely suggest that the interviews had been conducted in a search for abstractions. The table of contents does refer to some of those topics in a way I hope will be helpful for the researcher, but this interview, this person, really deserves a total reading. And the reader/researcher wishing to read further in the unpublished writings of Mrs. Arnstein, all of which can be found in The Bancroft Library, will note them referred to throughout the text.

Other sources for Flora Jacobi Arnstein history include the oral history conducted by the Regional Oral History Office with Lawrence Arnstein in 1964. (See note page 15.) For that memoir, Mrs. Arnstein was interviewed in a brief session on her teaching work. The Western Jewish History Center of the Judah Magnes Museum has document files on Flora J. Arnstein, with information on Oscar Weil, Ernest Bloch, Dame Myra Hess, Frederick Jacobi among others. A brief interview conducted with Mrs. Arnstein is also part of that collection. The Magnes Museum's Western Jewish history collections generally offer a parallel approach to the family history; stories of German Jewish merchants in the San Francisco Bay Area echo Mrs. Arnstein's family history, although probably nowhere is there anything quite like the glimpse into that life that Flora Arnstein, author, gives us as "Amy," memoirist, in No End to Morning.

The Arnstein interview was made possible by a long list of generous donors, fond friends, students, and relatives. Ruth Chance pledged the first gift and said, "Although I hardly know her, I have long, long enjoyed her poetry, her interest in children, her extraordinary wisdom about life."

Caroline Voorsanger offered to spearhead the fund raising, and recruited Sue Bransten and James Schwabacher as her lieutenants. Elizabeth Elkus was most helpful, advising the interviewer as to topics and relationships in Mrs. Arnstein's life. Edith Arnstein Jenkins was available to arrange for the initial interviews, and to answer follow-up questions. The response to the fund raising was really exceptional, though not surprising.

The Regional Oral History Office was established to tape record autobiographical interviews with persons prominent in recent California history. The office is under the direction of Willa K. Baum, division head, and under the administrative supervision of James D. Hart, the director of The Bancroft Library.

Suzanne B. Riess  
Interviewer-Editor

11 July 1985  
Regional Oral History Office  
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The Flora J. Arnstein papers in the Manuscripts Division of The Bancroft Library include correspondence with poets, poetry magazines and editors, essays and criticism written for a class with Walter Van Tilburg Clark at San Francisco State, 1960, collections of unpublished poetry, criticism of F.J.A.'s work by Sara Bard Field, Grace Hazard Conkling, and others. The following unpublished writings by F.J.A. are in The Bancroft Library: No End to Morning, Lengthening Days, Vignettes, Dear Harriet, and Stories. The Bancroft Library also holds editions of Children Write Poetry (Dover 1967), originally titled Adventure into Poetry (Stanford University Press 1951); Poetry and the Child (Dover 1970), originally Poetry in the Elementary Classroom (Appleton Century Crofts 1962, under the aegis of the National Council of Teachers of English); A Legacy of Hours (Grabhorn Press 1927); A Moth's Wing (Jonathan Elkus 1945); Light Widening (1975). Looking under Presidio Open Air School in The Bancroft Library, the reader will find bound books of poems by the students of F.J.A. from 1934, 1936-37, 1938-39, and 1939-40 classes.



## CHILDHOOD

[Interview 1: December 14, 1984; Interview 2: January 9, 1985;  
Interview 3: January 15, 1985]

Musical Education; Cousin Fred Jacobi

Arnstein: My grandfather, my father's father, was impoverished, but he used to take my father to concerts. Father told me they always sat on the highest seats. I guess he couldn't afford anything better.

My father was also very musical, though he never played an instrument or never was taught music, but he had a most discriminating ear. He could tell a poor composition the minute he heard it, if it was cheap or was trite or it was repetitive.

I inherited that discrimination from him, so that all my teachers thought I was more talented than I was. One of the reasons why I never progressed in music is because I was never taught enough technique. My teachers always took for granted that I knew what I didn't. One of my music teachers used to say to me, "Oh, that's easy. You can just practice that and it will come to you." It never came to me, of course.

Riess: You had a taste for music, but you didn't have a great musical ear.

Arnstein: I didn't have enough gift, just a discriminating taste which fooled everybody.

Riess: You had a musically gifted relative, Frederick Jacobi. After you left school at fourteen, you spent time in New York [Lengthening Days, pp. 1-4, 10]. Were you staying with his family there?

Arnstein: Yes, I was staying with my Aunt Flora. She was married to Frederick Jacobi, and her son was Frederick Jacobi, Jr. I was very devoted to him. He was about four years younger than I. He was born rather sickly, having a case of jaundice.

He was the only really musical person in the family, and he was a charming young man. He was everything that I wasn't. I was shy and restricted and repressed. He was open and friendly. I felt at the time very private about my music. I shared it only with him and my father, I wouldn't talk about it with anybody else. [laughs]

He was open about everything. He even played his music for his mother who was tone deaf. He played all his lessons to her, as a sort of respect. He took music lightly when it was to be taken lightly, and seriously when he was working. He became a composer, and his symphonies were played by orchestras and various quartets, Kneisel among them.

After he died, his wife, who was a pianist, tried to keep his works alive by having his quartets played. But he is never mentioned among the American musicians listed today. The reason I think is because he didn't originate anything. His work was charming and graceful and did not strike a new note.

Riess: Except in the use of the Indian themes.

Arnstein: Yes, that was a funny story too, about Mr. [Ernest] Bloch. One day there was a meeting after a string quartet competition had been judged, and somebody said to Mr. Bloch, "I hear you won a prize for your Indian theme quartet." Mr. Bloch said, "I never wrote any Indian quartet." My friend, Albert Elkus, was present and said, "Oh no, that's Fred Jacobi's work." Bloch said, "Lots of people are writing Bloch quartets these days." [laughs] He wasn't over modest.

Riess: When you went to live with the Jacobi family, were you tutored in academic subjects, or were you just studying music?

Arnstein: I didn't do any academic work in New York. I studied with Paulo Gallico first, the father of Paul Gallico the writer today.

Then, I studied another year with a woman by the name of Adele Margules, a Russian. She led a trio and gave yearly concerts. She told me once that she walked alone up the Alps with an alpenstock every summer, and I could imagine her doing it! She was that sort, somewhat masculine.



Arnstein: Another year I studied with Rafael Joseffy, a famous pianist who had retired and was teaching.

Riess: He's done a series of exercises, hasn't he?

Arnstein: Yes, I practiced some of his exercises. I didn't learn very much from him, because I was with him too short a time.

Riess: Who chose your teachers for you?

Arnstein: My cousin Fred. He was studying with Joseffy, as a matter of fact with all of them except Margules. My teacher in San Francisco, Mr. [Oscar] Weil, suggested Margules. He said, "She has a very different approach from mine, but you'll find it interesting."

Fred and I used to play four hands together. When I was in New York I also started harmony and counter-point with him, with Rubin Goldmark who was the nephew of the famous Karl Goldmark. [Lengthening Days, p. 52] Fred soon out-distanced me because he had a musical ear. I didn't stay in New York long enough to catch up with him, and actually I never could have caught up with him. I realized my limitations when I saw what he was able to do and I wasn't.

Riess: Did you attend a lot of musical events when you were in New York?

Arnstein: Yes. All of the famous musicians, [Ignace] Paderewski, [Josef] Hofmann, [Harold] Bauer, the whole bunch. I also saw Mark Twain dressed all in white, when I was in New York. His daughter had married Gabrilowitsch, the pianist, and Twain was going to the Gabrilowitsch concert.

Riess: ~~Were~~ there memorable performances you saw? Eleanor Duse?

Arnstein: I didn't see Duse, no. I did see Sarah Bernhardt, but that was later. I think she had had her leg amputated [1915] then and was wheeled onto the stage, but she had such an extraordinary voice, it was easy to imagine her a flying L'Aiglon. I saw Coquelin, the famous French actor, in Cyrano de Bergerac in Paris when I was there with my husband on our wedding trip. I saw Maude Adams in the original Peter Pan.

An Introduction to the Family, San Francisco and New York

Arnstein: My father was born in New York. He had a year of college there, and then came west and went into the wholesale wine--not liquor, wine--business, with my uncle, Fred Jacobi.

Riess: Did he yearn for the east coast, do you think?

Arnstein: No, my father didn't want to be on the east coast.

Riess: Did the easterners make annual trips west?

Arnstein: They came out here every summer.

Riess: Would you think of your family as being "western"?

Arnstein: Yes, surely. My mother was born, I think, in Sacramento. My grandparents both came from Germany. My grandfather came in 1850. He always said he wasn't a "forty-niner," he just missed out on that.\*

Riess: Is it the kind of "western" where one feels very related to the mountains and the ocean, and the physical environment?

Arnstein: Yes, I missed the vistas very much in New York. You don't see anything at all, only buildings. I'm used to looking out and seeing vistas, and I enjoy that.

I could go on at great lengths about San Francisco, but I don't want to do that now. It was quite a different city from what it is today. I remember way back when I was a girl, and it's not the same city.\*\*

Riess: Were the same social customs observed by your San Francisco family and friends as by the New York families?

Arnstein: Oh yes, absolutely.

Riess: Could you compare the life of your San Francisco family with the style of the New York family? How were the families different?

Arnstein: The New York family was freer. New York was more advanced in styles and other matters than San Francisco. Everything was slower to arrive here. But every year my aunt--I don't know

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\*See Appendix A, Family Tree.

\*\*See Appendix B, "Nostalgia: Growing Up in the Nineties."

Arnstein: whether at the request of my mother, or on her own accord--used to send my cousin and me a box of clothes. They were always in advance of the clothes here. There was a period when they had the leg-o-mutton sleeves, and I remember my mother insisted upon my wearing a blouse with such sleeves to school, and I was horrified. Children are so embarrassed by what other children say. I rang up my cousin, and asked her if she'd wear hers so she'd keep me company.

Riess: Which cousin is this?

Arnstein: Her name is Erma Arnstein. She's the "Tottie" in that book.  
[No End to Morning]

Riess: I'm struck by the size of the Jewish families, the clans of those days.

Arnstein: I know. My grandmother had eleven children, ten of whom lived; one died in his early days.

Riess: Was there ever any reflection on having a family this big?

Arnstein: They didn't have birth control, that's about it.

Riess: Were you introduced formally when you were in New York?

Arnstein: I was introduced to a lot of New York girls, but I found them very insular. They weren't the least bit interested in anything outside of New York. They never asked me a question about San Francisco. Nothing existed for them but New York when they talked among themselves.

There was only one woman that I had really liked, Helen Altschul. She was the wife of Frank Altschul. I liked her very much because she was the only one who made a personal relationship with me. When she came out here I drove her around, and showed her San Francisco. Later she became blind because she didn't follow her doctor's instructions about putting certain drops in her eyes. I don't know whether she's still alive, but if she is she is blind and senile.

Riess: Where did the Frederick Jacobi family live in New York?

Arnstein: They lived on 59th Street, right opposite the park. Later on, I think 58th Street, where the El ended. I'm not sure.

Father's Family, the Jacobis, and the Seligmans

Arnstein: I had two relatives in New York: the one I was staying with, my mother's sister, Aunt Flora, and the sister of my father. The latter, my Aunt Regina, was an extraordinary woman, and extremely interesting.

The circumstances in my father's family were this: he was the youngest of five children, four boys and a girl. His mother died either at his birth or shortly afterwards. The children were brought up by a kindly servant. The father was impecunious. They lived way down on the East Side where he owned a little grocery store.

One of the Seligmans of the celebrated Seligman family of England came to New York. The Seligmans and my father's family were distantly related. When Mrs. Seligman visited, she said to my grandfather, "This is no place to raise a girl, among these quarrelling boys. I'd like to take her to England with me and bring her up with my children."

So she took this girl and raised her in Europe. I admired my Aunt Regina inordinately. She spoke French, German, Italian, and English, and she was very musical. She married a man by the name of Seligsberg, and then lost her husband when she was a very young woman, and she came back to live in New York with her two children.

I just loved going to see her in New York, because it was such a wonderful atmosphere. Her son, whose name was Alfred Seligsberg, became the attorney for the Metropolitan Opera. He knew all the famous singers and musicians and used to bring them to his home. There would be quartets and other music. I just adored it! I used to sit in a corner--I never wanted to take part in anything, I was too shy. But I just loved being there. I didn't even understand their language. They spoke German or they'd go from one language to another. [Lengthening Days, 4-18]

Her daughter, Sophie, was a very fine amateur pianist who was the mistress of a famous doctor in New York.

Riess: No! Really?!

Arnstein: Yes, I only heard that later. I was pleased, because I thought she had been living such a restricted life.

Riess: Had she been set up by the doctor in a beautiful apartment?

Arnstein: No, she lived at home.

Riess: The "Aunt Laura" in No End to Morning, is she one of your mother's sisters?

Arnstein: Yes, my mother's oldest sister, the one for whom I was named, Flora, the mother of Fred Jacobi, the musician.

Riess: Did she marry a brother of your father's?

Arnstein: Yes, the two brothers married two sisters.

Riess: Tell me about it.

Arnstein: My uncle, Fred's father, was established here in the wholesale wine business. He sent for my father. My father came west, and, as was the custom in those days, requested my grandfather's permission to ask for my mother's hand in marriage. My grandfather said, "No, she's too young; you'll have to wait." So he waited four years and then he proposed to her, and she accepted him. I don't know how she came to do so--maybe her other sister had accepted the brother, and as she adored this sister, she thought it was the right thing to do. I don't know. [laughs] Anyway, they were married, and as I told you, very unsuitably.

Riess: How about the Aunt Flora and her husband? Was their marriage similarly peculiar?

Arnstein: No. One of her daughters told me, "The difference between your mother and my mother is that your mother is unhappy when your father is unkind to her because she loves him, and my mother has no use for my father."

#### Family Visits, Vacations, Holidays

Riess: Yet it sounds like the happiest times of all were when all of these relatives got together in your house in the summers.

Arnstein: It was the two daughters that came to our house. One of them I liked very much. She married a man by the name of Paul Baerwald, who was influential in the Second World War in Jewish relief. Actually, he was honored in Jerusalem afterwards. A social house of some sort was named after him. [Lengthening Days, 63-69]



Arnstein: This daughter whom I liked was the only one in the family who was not conventional. She went down to work at the Henry Street settlement. After she was married, she invited these girls that she had worked with, who were now mothers, up to her home once a month for tea. She listened to all their troubles, and not only did she do that and help them whenever she could, she even paid for the analysis for one of the women's daughter. The analyst met her one day and thanked her for doing so. She said, "Why are you thanking me? I couldn't have slept nights if I hadn't done it." She was that kind of a person. She and I had really nothing in common except a sort of humanitarianism which the others didn't have at all. The others were just conventional.

Riess: In the book [No End to Morning] it's "Rhoda" and "Tony" and "Edna".

Arnstein: "Edna" was the one--her name was Edith really--that I liked. The other girl I didn't like at all. She was also very reactionary. In fact, later on when the left-wing was prominent and she was married--to a very charming man, who was also very conventional and reactionary--she said to me then, "The world needs people like us to offset the communists." [laughs] I didn't agree with her, needless to say. I didn't think the world needed her one little bit. [laughs]

Riess: She was Rena?

Arnstein: Rena, her name was, but we called her Reny.

Riess: And then, Frederick.

Arnstein: Frederick was thirteen years younger than Rena.

When they visited, my father had no interest in Fred whatsoever. This was the strangest thing, I never could understand it. Whether he was jealous of the fact that this boy was so gifted and had opportunities for music study that he didn't, I don't know, but my father took no interest in him whatsoever.

Riess: They sound like happy times when the New York cousins came to visit.

Arnstein: Yes, it was a very happy time, and I must tell you a funny thing about myself, because I think it may be characteristic in some way. We used to go to meet them. The train was taken apart and put on a ferry boat at Benecia, and ferried over to Port Costa where it was put together again and came to Oakland. We used

Arnstein: to go to meet them, and it was a great treat for me because I enjoyed seeing them again, and noting all the characteristics that I had thought I had forgotten--"she was just the way she always was," and so forth. [No End to Morning, p. 72]

One day there was some mixup about their coming and they arrived a day sooner than expected. I was in bed in the next room with my brother because our own room had been prepared for the two sisters. I heard their voices in my parent's room but I didn't get up. I just lay there enjoying listening to them and thinking, "I'll see them tomorrow, but now I just like hearing them." Isn't that a funny thing? I never understood that quite.

Riess: Maybe it's some ambivalence, but mostly it sounds nice.

Arnstein: I don't think there was ambivalence because I loved having them here. Everything in our house was gay and lively when they came. My father was good-natured, we had fancy breakfasts. (I wrote that in the book.) Things were passed around that we didn't have usually. I had such a conscience that I used to wonder whether they thought we always had strawberries for breakfast, which we never did except when they were here. [laughs]

Riess: When you write in the book about going to the beach, what beach are you talking about?

Arnstein: Santa Cruz.

Riess: Did you have relatives who lived in Santa Cruz also?

Arnstein: We didn't have any relatives there, but we went down there every summer for our vacation. My cousins, the Max Brandenstein family, would go with us, and we'd take Fred with us always.

Riess: The Max Brandenstein family?

Arnstein: That's "Tottie's" father, MJB.

Riess: Did your father go on those vacations, or did he stay in the city?

Arnstein: No, he would come down weekends. He never got away on a vacation until he took us to Europe that time.

Riess: Was that the tradition, or do you think he was overworked, that he couldn't go away on vacation?

Arnstein: I don't know whether it maybe wasn't customary. I can't answer that.

Riess: The mixture of atheism plus anti-Gentilism, plus Christmas stockings at the end of the bed makes a very confusing religious picture.

Arnstein: Christmas was a secular affair to us. I didn't know it had any relation to Christianity. It was just a time when you received presents and gave other people presents. We always celebrated Christmas with my grandparents, one year at our house and the next at the Max Brandenstein's.

We children were always supposed, before presents were distributed, to give a performance. Did I have that in my book?

Riess: Yes, but I'd like to hear it.

Arnstein: Well, we had a performance and we prepared for it well ahead of time. "Tottie," Erma, was a sadist if ever there was one. She chose for her offering one that treated of a family in which the grandmother, the mother, and the child were all killed in the end. I said to her, "I don't think that's very nice for a Christmas poem." She said she liked it, so she gave it! She enjoyed making people unhappy. She made my brother cry all the time because he was very susceptible. She got a great kick out of that! She always played the witch, as I told you, in our games, always played the bad person.

Anyway, the little children would perform something and they were restless and giggly. I was always the last one on the program because I was the oldest, and I tried to recite something that would offset Erma's. I remember La Fontaine, "Le Renard et le Corbeau." Then I'd play a piece on the piano, and all the while I was playing the family would talk, which made me miserable, and I wished I had chosen a shorter piece to play.

Then the doors were thrown open and we saw the Christmas tree for the first time. But we were not allowed to open our presents until we had distributed the others to the adults.  
[No End to Morning, pp. 89-90]

Riess: There was never anything of Chanukah?

Arnstein: No, we never celebrated any Jewish festivals. You see, my parents were not affiliated with any temple. They were not practicing Jews at all. I did go to temple with my grandmother



KEY TO NAMES IN NO END TO MORNING

Grandpa - Joseph Brandenstein

Grandma - Jane Brandenstein - nee Rosenbaum

Uncle Fritz - <sup>max</sup> " <sup>from J.B.</sup>

Uncle Harry - Henry U. Brandenstein

Uncle Maury - Manfred Brandenstein- later changed to

Uncle Ernie - Edward Brandenstein " Brapsten

Uncle George - Charles Brandenstein " "

Aunt Tillie- Nee Brandenstein married to William Green-  
baum, later changed to Green

Aunt Agnes - " " married to Joseph Silverberg

Aunt Flora - " " married to Frederick Jacobi

Uncle Ned - Frederick Jacobi

Edna - Edith Jacobi daughter of Frederick

Rhode Bena Jacobi " "

Tony - Frederick Jacobi Jr. son of Frederick

Mama Edith Jacobi, nee Brandenstein

Papa - Jacob Jackson Jacobi, husband of Edith

Willie Jacobi son of "

Danny - A. Leonard Jacobi son of Jacob J.

Missy - Janet " daughter of "

Baby - Horace son of Jacob Jacobi

Aunt Ella \* Bertha Brandenstein wife of Max/ B.

Uncle Fritz - Max J. Brandenstein (founder of MJB)

Tottie - Erma Brandenstein daughter of Max.

Bob - Frederick Theodore Brandenstein - son of Max.

Maud - Guerin de Quetteville Robin- nurse-

Helene - Struven "second girl".

Walter Flatow

Fraulein Helms - Miss tum Suden - German teacher=

Mme du Bois - Mme. Heymans - French Teacher

Mrs. Stein- Mrs Adolph Steinberger

The Godeaus - Godchaux family

Miss Mason - Miss Elizabeth L. Murison, principal of school  
of same name.

"The Girls" - Helen and Gertrude Arnstein, later married,  
respectively to Ansley K. Salk and Harry  
Wollenberg

Elise Lasalle - Enid Brandt

Dr. Newman - Dr. Leo Newmark



Arnstein: sometimes. I write about that in here, about going on Rosh Hashanah. [No End to Morning, pp. 13-15] My grandmother was religious, but my grandfather went to temple only on the high holy days.

### Mismatched Parents, Impossible Standards

Arnstein: My parents were the most mismated couple in the world. She was a very simple, warm-hearted, kindly person, and he was an intellectual. He read only belles lettres and history--what he didn't know of history wouldn't be worth talking about--and only the best novelists, Henry James and Joseph Conrad. She read contemporary novels. She liked to play cards in the evening; he didn't like to play cards with her. He liked to hear music; she wasn't interested in music. She liked the theater; he wouldn't go to the theater. They were just absolutely mismated. The only thing they had in common was us children, and they certainly mishandled us between them.

Riess: It must have been hard to be his son.

Arnstein: He had three sons. The one of them that survived was Leny. I never could understand that Father was so indifferent to him, so uninterested in him. (My daughter later explained that she thought he was afraid to put too much emotion in the relationship on account of having lost the other sons. I don't know.) Leny told me once that my father said only one nice thing to him in his whole life: he complimented him on some work he had done. My father never complimented me. You "spoiled" children if you complimented them in those days.

It was a funny era to be brought up in, very repressive. You weren't allowed to go out with boys, except for a walk. They could come to see you in your own home, but you couldn't go to theater with them. You couldn't go anywhere unchaperoned.

Riess: In a way, because it was the west, you would think it would have been somewhat loosened or liberalized.

Arnstein: It is very strange. My grandfather, who'd come from Germany, the father of my mother, was a German Jew. Every phase of Americanism and of Germanism and of Jewishism was part of him. He participated in all charitable organizations, Jewish or Christian, in the city. German companies that traveled around America, the players, he invited them to his home and had them perform there. My mother never knew anything about anti-Semitic prejudice until she married my father.

Arnstein: My father carried a chip on his shoulder. If a Gentile approached him, he always said to himself, "What does he want of me?" She took over his prejudice. During the First World War, women went down to some meeting place and made bandages for the soldiers. One Gentile lady took a great fancy to my mother. They had met in Europe. When they came home she invited my mother to tea. My mother wouldn't go. I said to her, "Why won't you go, she likes you." Mother said, "She's a Gentile," and that was that.

Mother wouldn't let me attend any of my Gentile friends' parties, the girls I knew at school. We never had a Gentile at our family table, except an old woman who--I've given her real name in the book, Helene--who was with us as a servant for twenty-five years. [No End to Morning, pp. 53-56] When she got married she had dinner with us, but otherwise we never had a Gentile at our table.

Riess: Did you ever challenge your father on that subject?

Arnstein: No, I never challenged my father on anything. I never balked. I was a retiring person and I hated any dissension. I should have stood up for myself lots of times, which I didn't do. I was afraid of him.

He had one way of punishing you which was devastating. He wouldn't talk to you for two weeks, he just looked through you, you just weren't there. He did the same to my mother, and between us we suffered terribly over it. I realized only later how much he must have suffered too, because his pride wouldn't let him apologize.

Riess: Of course, your mother had all of her family for support.

Arnstein: Yes, she did, but my father had contempt for her family. When he wanted to make a remark that would hurt her, he'd say, "Your son is just like your family." Her family was sacrosanct to her, she adored them all.

Riess: Was that fear of the Gentile pervasive in your social community? Or was it just your father's?

Arnstein: I don't know whether it was, I don't think so. I don't think my father ever made peace with his own Jewishness. I think that was it. He had nothing to fall back on, no Jewish religion, no Jewish tradition. He was just a Jew because he was a Jew.

Riess: Do you think that the Jew who is better grounded in his religion would have not felt so threatened?





*Left, Flora Jacobi, 1899*

*Photograph by Arnold Genthe*

*Below, Mr. and Mrs. Jacob J. Jacobi, photographed on their 25th wedding anniversary, with Flora, Janet, and Leonard*

*Photograph by Dassonville*





Arnstein: I don't know.

My niece, in adherence to tradition, had both her boys bar mitzvahed--but they both married Gentiles. I asked her, "Why did you have them bar mitzvahed?" She said her husband had been, and "Well, I also believe in tradition. I think the tradition of the Jews is a fine thing. It's nothing to be ashamed of, it's something to be proud of." Tradition I think is something that people have to fall back on, but my father didn't have that.

Riess: How about the Max Brandensteins?

Arnstein: They were as we were. None of that generation was religious.

Riess: That's interesting. How about your husband's family?

Arnstein: No, and in fact my parents disapproved of them very much because they entertained Gentiles. [laughs]

Brother Leonard, Sister Janet, and Living Up to Expectations

Arnstein: My father was a very strange man. Because he had had a very impoverished youth, he was very parsimonious. At the time when it cost five cents to take a street car, he would walk. But he was generosity itself to his children. He left us, on his death, an inheritance enough that my husband could retire at the age of sixty. He was always generous to us, his children.

Riess: If you asked for things, were you given them?

Arnstein: I never asked for anything, I wouldn't have thought of asking for anything. I used to love to go to concerts with him. That's a little story in that book, so I won't tell it, about the little girl that went to the concert. [No End to Morning, pp. 92-97] But no, I never asked anything of him.

Strangely enough, when Franklin Roosevelt was running for his third term, my father called me into his room and said, "I've never asked anything of you"--he had, but he couldn't remember--"but I'm going to ask you not to vote for Roosevelt." I was horrified. He also asked my sister, but she was a much stronger person than I and she just voted for Roosevelt and didn't tell my father. I didn't vote at all, which was just as much as giving the other man the vote, because I was afraid of him, that was it.

Riess: What did your brother go on to do in life, and your sister?

Arnstein: My sister was a naturalist. [Janet Jacobi Nickelsburg, died 1983] She taught nature study at various public schools, in recent years as a volunteer. She donated a room at the museum in the park, "Discovery Room," where children could take out boxes containing feathers or stones or anything else. I was there when they dedicated the room in her name, and the children were just enchanted. They'd take out a box of stones and call to another child, "Come, look at what I got!"

My brother was in my father's business. [Leonard Jacobi, died 1968] First he was in a business with my brother-in-law, which he didn't like at all. Then he went in with my father. He had wanted to be a lawyer, but my father took him out of college after a year to be in the business with him.

Riess: So that was another thwarted career?

Arnstein: Yes, he was very thwarted. He was an immature man; he never grew up emotionally, really. He was never able to express his antagonism; it was all broiling around inside of him.

Riess: Were you and your sister similar sorts of children?

Arnstein: Absolutely different. Her interests were all in nature study and external things, and my interest was all in poetry, and music, the arts. We were very different in that sense. Of course, we had a lot in common, our ethics and our background, all that sort of thing.\*

Riess: Was she older or younger?

Arnstein: Seven years younger, but she aged very quickly. The last time she came to see me I was horrified at how she'd aged. She was wrinkled and her hair was thinning. She had all sorts of things wrong with her.

Riess: Was she brought up in the same way you were?

Arnstein: My father was very much more indulgent of her. She said that she always had a feeling--and that was one of her antagonisms to me--that I was the preferred one in the family, which I was--she was quite right about that. My father and my mother both pampered me, much to my disadvantage because I thought there was something wrong with me, that I had to be spared. You know? I went through all the time thinking, "What's wrong with me that I have to be spared?"

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\*See Appendices C & D.



Arnstein: My father was a stickler for punctuality. If I was three seconds late for dinner I got two weeks in Coventry. My sister could be ten minutes late, and he wouldn't say a thing about it.

He was very indulgent of her husband, who had multiple sclerosis. She told me my father said one day, "I have the two nicest sons-in-law in the world." I couldn't understand that. He didn't like my husband at all, my husband didn't have any of the qualities that he valued. He wasn't interested in literature, or in music, he was interested in public health. (I guess you know about this--he had an oral history.\*) My father didn't know his gifts; they were manifested after his death, but my father was not interested in public health anyway.

I always felt instinctively he didn't like my husband, in spite of what my sister had said. My husband used to walk up and down with him after dinner when he was smoking a cigar, and I would be playing the piano. My father didn't want that at all, and my husband didn't know it. [laughs] He liked to be alone. My father was a loner by choice, and my husband was a very gregarious person; he liked people, anybody he could do anything for. He would throw everything down that he was doing to help anybody.

After four years of his courting me, I decided that none of those traits my father possessed mattered one speck to me. What really mattered was that my husband and I had the same values. We valued certain things that were to us incontrovertible, but he would accede to things that I wanted to do, if I cared much about them and he didn't. And I would accede to him where I also didn't care too much. For the rest, we shared. So I think we pulled off a much happier marriage than most people have.

Riess: Was it the first time you had really gone against your father's wishes?

Arnstein: I didn't go against his wishes, because [laughs]--I don't want to go into that because that's in my book. Finally when I got engaged, which was the day before his birthday, I went in to my father and told him. [Lengthening Days, p. 90] My parents had been prepared for it, because my husband had been visiting

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\*Lawrence Arnstein, Community Service in California Public Health and Social Welfare, an oral history conducted 1961, 1964 by the Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1964.

Arnstein: me pretty regularly, and so they accepted him. He never made a real relationship with my mother. I don't think she understood him at all.

### The Arnstein Girls

Riess: When I talked with Helen Salz she said there were three or four girls who were close friends.\*

Arnstein: Yes, there were four of us. She, her sister Gertrude, and myself, and a girl named Alice Sussman who married an Arnstein, too--a cousin of my husband's, Walter Arnstein.

Riess: You mentioned "The Girls" very briefly in the book. [No End to Morning, pp. 70-81; Lengthening Days, pp. 54, 55]

Arnstein: I could tell you a lot about them. The eldest one, Helen, was a painter and a poet. She was the leader. She was the one who was always finding new things, new books to read, new experiences, and that sort of thing. She was also a very restless person. It used to bother me very much because I liked to go into depths in matters, and the minute we got immersed in anything she'd say, "Let's take a walk."

The second girl, Gertrude, was my particular friend. She was extraordinary, much advanced of her age, and more mature than I. I came across a letter of hers the other day that she had written me when I was married and on our wedding trip in New York. I was having a visit with Helen there. I had been to New York, as I've told you, several times, and there was a distant relative of my husband's whom he didn't like at all. She was a very crude woman. Her husband was a doctor, and she had four sons, all of whom she ruled with an iron hand. Well, I used to say I was like the measles--all the boys caught me every year I visited New York, each one except the youngest who was too young. [laughs]

The second boy was Herbert. He was the only one I was really interested in. The third, Ernest, I played four hand piano with. Herbert was of a literary turn of mind. He wrote the most beautiful letters. He introduced me to Conrad, and I introduced him to Henry James, and we corresponded.

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\*Helen Arnstein Salz, Sketches of an Improbable Ninety Years, an oral history conducted 1973, 1974, Regional Oral History Office, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1975.

Arnstein: But he was very persistent. He would do things like ring me up and ask me to go out with him on a Sunday, and I would say, "I can't do it today, I'm going to a concert with Fred this afternoon." What does he do but come down to our house where I was staying. My cousin Edith, whom I was so fond of, writes me a note saying, "Herbert is here. If you don't want to see him go up to Aunt Regina's." She gives this to the elevator man. Then what does Herbert do but take the letter from him, read it, and when I come home he hands it to me.

I said to him one time, "Why do you do everything that I hate? You say you like me, and yet you do all the things that I despise?" He said, "You might as well get used to me because I'm going to marry you some day." Well, I would as soon have married the ash man as marry him. Gertrude, in her letter to New York wrote me--and this was long before Freud--"How unhappy that boy must have been, being forced to do these things he knew you didn't like, and yet driven to do them."

My husband was also very persistent. He proposed to me after the earthquake, and I refused him. That's a funny story. I'll tell you that.

#### Earthquake, and Courtship and Europe

Arnstein: My cousin Frances Hellman [Mrs. Isaih W.], the oldest of the Jacobi girls, had a beautiful estate in San Leandro. [Dunsmuir House] It was sold and is owned now by the city of Oakland. It was originally built by some actor, I forget his name.

She [Mrs. Hellman] came to San Mateo after the earthquake and took the twelve of us, my mother and father and we three children along with Helene, six in all, and the Brandensteins had also the equivalent number--she took all twelve of us to live in her house.

When we were leaving the city, which we did a day after the earthquake, my father had found some kind of truck, and we drove down towards San Mateo. I was much more afraid of the fire than I had been of the earthquake. We didn't know anything about the amount of casualties from the earthquake--although we might have, because a bookcase nearly fell on my husband-to-be, it just missed him by an inch or so. [story is continued in Lengthening Days, pp. 37-44]

Arnstein: Well, he was very persistent and he proposed to me. And believe it or not, I'd never been kissed by a boy. One night, I don't know how it happened, but he kissed me. Then, I thought I was irrevocably committed, and I spent the whole night crying because I didn't want to get married. I was very immature; I was twenty, but a twelve year old girl knows more now than I did then.

I came into my parent's room the next morning crying my eyes out. Father said, "What's the matter?" I told him. He said, "Just go and tell Lawrie that you don't want to get married." I said, "I can't." "Why can't you?" I said, "I don't know, but I can't." He said, "How would it be if I told him?" So that was marvelous, it was an out for me. At the same time I felt ashamed of myself that I was unable to meet the situation.

My father went to see him, and what occurred I never knew, either from him or from my husband, but I'd given Lawrie a ring that I had on, and father came home and he put his arm around me, and said, "You don't need to worry anymore, he understands," and he took out of his vest pocket my ring and handed it to me.

Well, Lawrie kept on being persistent, and my father decided to go to Europe. I think what he thought was that I would forget about the whole business if we went to Europe.

Riess: When the family all went to Europe, where did you go? [Lengthening Days, pp. 31-36]

Arnstein: We went to London, and to Paris. I had an uncle living in Paris; he was married there. We went to Frankfurt, where he had moved, and to a place called Misurina, which is in the Italian alps. Then, we went to small towns in Switzerland.

While there we received a garbled cable, so that we couldn't tell for twenty-four hours what it meant. It stated that somebody had died, either my grandmother or my grandfather. It turned out to be my grandmother. My mother didn't want to travel any longer; she wanted to come home to be with her family.

My father I think was delighted, because he hated travelling, loathed it, and he just made us miserable! We had to be at the train station an hour before the train left; we had to go back to our hotel to see whether we'd forgotten anything, and then he'd go back to make sure we hadn't. You couldn't have a good time. I was sitting in the train compartment reading one day, and he came in, took my book, threw it across the room, and said, "I didn't bring you to Europe to read; you can do that at home. Look out the window!" [laughs]



Arnstein: We never were supposed to laugh, we were supposed to take it all seriously, it was all educational. One place we came to must have been originally some kind of castle. The bridal suite was given to my parents, and it was a room that was twice as long as this, and my brother started laughing. My father gave him the dickens! You had to be serious, you couldn't laugh, you couldn't have any fun on the trip. [laughs] I was glad to come home.

There is another part to our going to Europe in 1903. When I quit school here, my parents didn't want me to curtail my education. So they engaged a woman professor from the University of California, I think probably the first woman professor, Jessica Peixotto. She was an economist, but she didn't teach us economics, she taught us English and history. I never learned a thing from her, but I had a teenage crush on her. I thought she was the most charming person in the world.

Riess: She was tutoring you? Was that the idea?

Arnstein: No, we had a little group of girls that she was tutoring.

Riess: Who else was in the group?

Arnstein: One was a married woman, and I don't know who the others were, I've forgotten.

Riess: How much resistance on your parents' part was there to your leaving school?

Arnstein: Well, you see, of all the girls I knew, only two went to college. My father was very much opposed to my leaving home. I wanted to go, and I asked Miss Peixotto whether she wouldn't speak to him about it, which she did, and he said, "Well, you can go if you're willing to commute to and from Berkeley." Then he took us to Europe, I think he did it because he thought I'd forget about college. [laughs] I don't know, I have that idea anyway.

After Europe, we came back to San Francisco and rented a home near my grandparents. Shortly after that the earthquake of 1906 happened and we went to live over in Berkeley for two years. That was the time I went to New York. My husband was courting me, and I was very immature. I didn't want to get married, but he was very persistent and bothered the life out of me, so my father was glad to send me to New York.

That evening of the earthquake I was to have gone to the opera with a young French friend, Michel Weill, the head of the White House department store. He was a great friend of my

Arnstein: husband's. I don't know why my parents made an exception to my going out alone with a man. Well, of course there was no opera that night, and I was told Caruso escaped into the street.

Riess: Rafael Weill was--?

Arnstein: Was his uncle, and he inherited the store after Rafael Weill died.

Riess: When did you start having suitors?

Arnstein: Tutors?

Riess: Suitors.

Arnstein: Suitors?

Riess: Boyfriends! [laughs]

Arnstein: I had boyfriends right along, before the earthquake. In fact one of them, my husband-to-be, was living half a block away from us. His home was the last that was burnt. They had begun to dynamite then. His parents had a Japanese servant, and Lawrie and the servant dug a big hole in the garden and put an ashcan into it, and they stashed away all of the family silver in it. That was the only thing that was saved of their belongings. (My husband's youngest sister inherited the "earthquake silver," and when she died my grandson received it.) The day after the earthquake, Lawrie came up to my father and said he was taking his sisters over to Berkeley, and could he take me. My father was very indignant, "Don't you know this is not a time to separate families?" [laughs]

#### A Letter, April 1906, to "The Girls"

Arnstein: [Mrs. Arnstein has been sorting through her papers as this conversation from 2/6/85 interview was taking place] Would you be interested in a letter that I wrote after the earthquake? [Lengthening Days, pp. 37-42]

Riess: Yes.

Arnstein: I'm going to read it to you, I'm not going to give it to you.

I wrote to my sisters-in-law who were then not my sisters-in-laws, they were just my friends:

Arnstein:       Dearest Girls,

I've mailed a letter to you to Berkeley, and telephoned to Alameda, also inquired from everyone I've seen, as to your whereabouts. I've been crazy to see you and to know how you are, and where you are quartered. But, somehow, though I know where everyone I don't care about is, I can't seem to trace you. I've thought of you all along, and wondered what your plans are. I heard--

One of our friends, Alice Sussman had married a cousin of Lawrie's, after the earthquake, Walter Arnstein, who was out from the East.

--they were married and had gone East, but I heard so many rumors I didn't know whether that was true or not.

I don't know if any of this is of interest.

Riess:       It is. Go on.

Arnstein:       I felt terrible about her marriage for a time. Alice's going away, and goodness knows when I'll see her again. It seems to put an end to all the past. I realize only now, how close I felt to her. However, I pray she'll be happy. It was so fortunate that Wally was able to be up and around, and had not been operated--

He was operated for appendicitis in New York.

I can imagine how you feel about losing him. As to our plans, I know nothing, except that the folks are trying to find a house this side of the bay. They have been unsuccessful so far. Therefore, we'll be on hand here. For the present we're at--

This was my cousin Frances Hellman.

--Frances's place in San Leandro. Though it's beautiful and I'm extremely grateful for such an ideal shelter, I can't bear the laziness, and am begging the folks to let me find something to do. I feel so badly for all the suffering people in San Francisco. Isn't it fearful? I can't think of it, and be content to take it easy over here.

I wish I knew how you are, and if you're comfortable. I should be so relieved to know. I'm sending this to--



Arnstein: This was my husband's aunt who made that picture of me for a wedding present.

--to Aunt Ollie [Olga Ackerman] and hope that she'll forward it to you. I can't forgive myself for not having thought of that way of reaching you before.

As to our life, last week it's been on the order of that of the forty-niners, but we've been such a cheerful lot, and have been so grateful for what we've had, that there has been no moaning all along.

The day of the earthquake, we spent the night in the park. We felt safer there. Though it was bitter cold, and food was not plentiful, we didn't mind it on the whole. Next morning we went back to our house, and found Father's truck there. We loaded it with all we could lay hands on in the excitement, and went again to the park. We consisted of Aunt Bertha--

That was my mother's eldest brother Max's wife.

--with her family, Uncle Max, their children, and our family, the Jacobis. We spent most of the day in the park, but left there toward evening in a Nathan Dohrmann wagon and a Union Transfer truck and reached Ocean View, I think, about dark. Then we were hailed by a man who proved to be an old employee of my fathers. He offered us two rooms in his house for the night, and we slept eight in a room, on the floor, at least indoors. Next day, we trundled all morning and reached San Mateo at noon. Here, we were more--

I can't read the letter.

--a very sorry looking sight, I assure you. At San Mateo we met Aunt Agnes, and managed to find a small cottage to live in. In my whole life I never did the work I did then. But really, on the whole I liked it, and was overjoyed that I did not mind it.

I met Lawrence--

That was to be my husband later.

--the day we left town. He looked dreadful, poor fellow. It seems perfectly awful to report that our menfolk all are at work in town while we are in the country. The future no one predicts.

Arnstein: Let me hear from you as soon as this reaches you.

It is years since I've heard from you. Give lots of love to your parents.

Well, that was after the earthquake.

Riess: That's very interesting. You must have felt so disconnected.

Arnstein: Yes, we were disconnected, and I was afraid, not so much at the earthquake, though it was repeated for several days. I was more afraid of the fire, because there was only one exit from the city, and that was the road to San Mateo. I thought if we were surrounded by the fire we wouldn't be able to get out.

Riess: When you say that you had never worked so hard before, what were you doing?

Arnstein: Housework.

### Mothers, Daughters, and Self-images

Riess: What were you reading when you were young?

Arnstein: Elsie Dinsmore, and boy's books, Phil, the Fiddler, and a series of success stories--Five Little Peppers and How They Grew, and the St. Nicholas Magazine.

Riess: Did your mother read to you a lot? Is that one of your memories?

Arnstein: I can't remember whether she read to me.

Riess: The Eudora Welty autobiography came out recently. Her mother would drop everything to read to her. I was so impressed by that.

Arnstein: Yes, I read it, I know. I saw her on television recently, too. She's a homely woman, but attractive. That reminds me that I met Maeterlinck's mistress in New York when I was there one time. She was a Frenchwoman and she was not good-looking at all, but I remember thinking to myself, "The French make a cult of ugliness." She was utterly charming. I met her at a reception for Stravinsky. My cousin Fred Jacobi took me to that reception, and there was Maeterlinck's mistress. I didn't meet Stravinsky personally.

Riess: Is your recollection of your mother that she was always very busy, or did she have time for you?

Arnstein: Oh no, she was very devoted to her children. She was a very conventional woman. She did the marketing, took care of the children, and household, and all.

Riess: You told in Lengthening Days about your coming-out party. That was very unconventional, wasn't it? [Lengthening Days, pp. 60, 61]

Arnstein: Yes, my mother never gave conventional parties. She said to me, "Would you like to have a party at the Palace Hotel?" I said, "No." We had so many there, and the mothers of the debutantes sat on the sidelines and it was kind of dull. "No." She said, "Well, how would you like to have a 'dress up' party, dress up as children?" I said, "Oh, I think that would be fun." So we got out those invitations, and she rented some desks, and we were all seated at them.

Riess: It's interesting that she had this instinct to go against the conventional.

Arnstein: She didn't in other things. But in parties she never had us play the old games, "Pin the Tail on the Donkey" and all the stuff that they had at every party. She always had something new. One of the games she invented, I don't know if I wrote that, was ribbons attached to the wall, and each child was given the end of a ribbon, and the ribbons were all knotted in the middle, and whoever got them untied first got the prize. These were the sort of things that she invented.

Riess: In the family portrait in this book [Lengthening Days, p. 84], it's the twenty-fifth anniversary of your parents, and I thought that your mother looked remarkably young.

Arnstein: She always did. She looked very young, even until her death.

Riess: And sort of abstracted and childlike.

Arnstein: Yes, she was a very simple person, in her interests, in her needs. She had a kind of innocence right to the end of her life.

Riess: Looking at that picture last time, after we stopped taping, you were saying something about how characteristic everyone is there. To me your father doesn't look formidable.

Arnstein: He had his two sides to him. He was very advanced in some ways, and very difficult in other ways, but he was very down to earth.

My sister was also down to earth. I told you she always had a feeling that my parents favored me instead of her, which they actually did. She compensated for their lack of support by her excellence at school. I always knew I had more ability than I showed there, but I was so scared when examinations came around that I did terribly in them. The girl next to me, who I knew was stupid because I learned much quicker than she did, did much better than I did in examinations. But I was frightened a whole week ahead of them.

[In the photograph] my mother and I are more or less idealistic, looking out into "never-never land," and my brother is smoldering in his resistance--which he was never able to bring out. He needed support, which he never got from my parents. I was more of a mother to him for years than my mother.

Riess: In your "never-never land," can you recall what you really expected to do in your life?

Arnstein: No. I never expected to be a professional musician, I expected to be able to play for my pleasure. I learned very early in the game, when I worked with Fred in New York, that I didn't have the talent to become a professional.

Riess: Did you always want to get married and have children? Was that part of the picture that you had for yourself?

Arnstein: I didn't think of marriage. I was very retarded! [laughs]

Riess: But your sense of yourself in terms of what you thought you could achieve?

Arnstein: I always wanted to write. I never was able to. I was blocked by my father, as I told you.

Riess: You had the newspaper that you did with "the girls."

Arnstein: I was looking at that the other day. I was horrified at it. My writing was so poor, terrible. The syntax was poor, the writing was poor, it was just awful.

Riess: Well, maybe you didn't have very good editors!

Arnstein: We edited it ourselves.

Riess: Was there any debate about where you would go to school when the time came?

Arnstein: No. I was taken to school by my father when I was seven years old. [No End to Morning, pp. 76-78] I remember that striking me as strange, because I had never been taken anywhere except by my mother. My mother evidently was just expecting her baby--that was my sister who was seven years younger than I--so she didn't take me. My father left me there and I thought, "My God, I've never been left before with strangers, Mother never did this."

The principal was a very formidable person to me. When she came down the hall she was like a parade. One of the girls said to me, "She's the principal." That didn't mean anything to me, I didn't know what principal meant. She called all the girls by their last names. My mother went to see her later on to inquire how I was getting along, and what she said to her was, "Miss Jacobi weeps." [laughs] I had wept when she came down the stairs because a dog came down with her and I was frightened to death of dogs. I began to cry. When she said, "Miss Jacobi weeps," my mother thought her absurd, and when she told my grandmother, she laughed to tears. [laughs]

Riess: Tell me more about this school.

Arnstein: I was put in a Latin class which had been working already for some months. I was new at it, so the principal started to coach me in the mornings, but I was frightened of her. I would have my mother hear my vocabulary the night before and I would be perfect on it, but when I came to Miss Murison I couldn't remember a thing. She'd say, "You haven't studied." I'd whimper, "Yes, I have." "Here I am giving you my time and you don't study," she would say. I don't know how we came to stop, but we did after a while, to my great relief!

Riess: It sounds thoroughly traumatic! Where could you have gone to school if you hadn't gone there?

Arnstein: I don't know. There were public schools in those days I guess, but everybody I knew was sent to private schools.

Riess: Was it all Jewish children at that school?

Arnstein: No, it was not. There were a number of Jewish children. The principal was unprejudiced, I'll say that for her, but there was a great deal of prejudice in this school which I felt--an undercurrent of prejudice. I took it to myself. I thought, "There must be something wrong with me if people think ill of me." I carried that inferiority along with me for years.



Riess: Did your father have any trouble with the idea that you were going to a school with gentiles?

Arnstein: No, I don't think so, but my mother wouldn't let me go to any of their parties.

Riess: I read your story about Gertrude Käsebier doing your portrait.

Arnstein: Yes, she told me to take one photograph rather than another. I said that my parents wouldn't like it, it didn't look like me. She said, "In a few years it won't matter whether it looks like you or not. But you'll have a good Käsebier."

Riess: In the family were you considered a pretty little girl?

Arnstein: People never praised you in my days because they thought praising would "spoil you." You were never given a word of praise for anything.

Riess: When you were being put into your beautiful dresses, with bows and everything, didn't your mother say, "Flora, you look so pretty."

Arnstein: No, I never was told I was pretty, period.

Riess: What did you think?

Arnstein: I don't remember. I suppose I accepted it as the norm.

Riess: I mean, about what you looked like.

Arnstein: I grew up in a very repressive age. You accepted everything.

Riess: Personal beauty was not something that was spoken of in any way?

Arnstein: Not to your children anyway.

Riess: You also have a very wonderful Genthe portrait. When did Genthe do you? How did that happen?

Arnstein: Sometime in my teenage, I don't know just when. Imogen Cunningham wanted to buy that, and I wouldn't let her. She wanted to buy the Käsebier, too. She said, "Those are very valuable." I said I didn't want to give them up.

Riess: Did Genthe tell you what to wear?

Arnstein: I don't have any idea. All I remember is that they put tissue paper in me here, evidently to make me have a bust. [laughs] That's all I remember of it.

Thoughts on Grieving and Repression

Riess: In No End to Morning you were a little girl who took walks alone and sought out solitude. Were you a loner, would you say?

Arnstein: I don't like to use the word "loner" because it has wrong connotations, but I've always been a person who doesn't mind being alone, who likes being alone. My father was that way, too. I don't feel bored being alone. I have plenty to do, plenty to think of. I've never joined any committees, I've never been part of any social betterment groups. I have felt a little guilty about this sometimes.

Riess: You also bring up in the book the deaths of your two brothers. [No End to Morning, pp. 31, 32, 112, 113] Was writing about that the first time you had really dealt with it?

Arnstein: My little brother was four years old. You know, Dr. Settlage told me once that children don't grieve. I said, "Maybe they don't grieve as adults do, but I remember grieving very much because I had nobody else to play with," And my other brother was too young, then only two years old, so he was no companion to me.

My baby brother was born sickly. My mother attributed this to the fact that she'd had a bad cough while she was carrying him. None of his innards functioned right, he didn't breathe right, he didn't defecate right, nothing was right with him at all. I remember when I was a girl we went to live in San Rafael because the doctor thought that maybe a change of climate would be good for him. Nothing helped.

I was crazy about this child. When he was born, it was a strange thing--. You see what repression does; I didn't notice any difference in my mother's appearance while she was carrying the child, but she was making baby clothes and I found a cradle in the attic. My mother said to me after the baby was born, "Did you know there was a baby coming?" I said, "Yes," and she was horrified. "How could I know things like that?" I rushed out of the room thinking, "How can you help knowing when she was making baby clothes." Of her looks, I just thought she was not as tidy as she had used to be.

How much can you repress? The night before the baby was born I registered in some strange way that Father was gentle with my mother. Then, the next morning he came in to me, took me by the hand, and brought me into the room where Mother was in bed. I was scared, I thought she was sick or something.



Arnstein: He led me over and showed me the baby. From that moment I adopted him; he was not Mother's, he was mine. The minute I'd got home from school--I commuted to San Francisco to school--I'd rush to the baby carriage and take him in my arms. He whimpered most of the time when he was awake; the child was a sad little infant, and I would sing him to sleep. He was musical; he would keep time with his little foot when I would sing to him.

I was at school when he died. The aunt who was married to Max Brandenstein rang me up at school and told me to come to her house. She must have been a very unfeeling person, because she said to me bluntly, "Your brother has died." Well, somehow I never pictured him dying. I knew he was sick but--. I asked her for a shawl, I was shivering. I sat all that day looking out of the window.

You talk about grieving. Oh, I must tell you, I was afraid to see my mother after the first baby died because I'd been taken to my grandmother's and left there--did I write that? I thought something would be changed in my mother, and I was afraid to see her. I didn't see my mother here either. The family had moved back to San Francisco and I was again afraid to see her. When I got home, there was no mention of the baby, so this was again repressed.

All I remember is the feeling that my arms were empty. At nighttime I'd go to bed and think about my empty arms. That was the only grieving I did.

Riess: With the first baby, you said in the book that you felt guilty somehow.

Arnstein: Well, that's what Dr. Settlage told me, "Every child feels guilty at a death." He said that's a common experience. Children feel that in some way they're responsible, but I don't think I felt responsible for the baby's death.

Riess: Oh golly, so much unspoken.

Arnstein: Everything was just repressed. It was a strange era to be brought up in, an era of complete repression. How did I ever break through it? Dr. Settlage told me, interestingly, "You broke through, through your poetry. Your poetry is for you a release and a product of your unconscious. Just as the dreams are in an analysis the association with the unconscious, your poems play that role for you." They do, because I don't know where they come from. I write from a word, or I write from a phrase.

Arnstein: I've spoken to a number of writers and poets and I ask them, "How do you come to write?" Some tell me they look out the window, some tell me from a book, some tell me from an idea-- each one has a different approach to writing. But you know, though the approach is different, the act of writing is the same because they all say, "It came to me." Well, what does that mean? They're in touch with their unconscious though they don't know it.

## GROWING UP, AND LOOKING BACK

[Arnstein: I wrote to the editor of the Chronicle and told him I was distressed at the many mistakes in the article he had written about me.\* "To begin with I don't live on Diamond Heights. I don't go with my daughters to the Palace, but with my daughter and granddaughters. Referring to the Spanish-American war you wrote 'after that.' It should read 'before that'!" [laughs] "It was not Harding that I saw from my window, but McKinley. Finally, it was not my parent's home that was next to the de Young's, but my grandparent's. I regret these errors. Would you kindly return the book I loaned you."

I had a letter from him saying, "Dear Ms. Arnstein: The editor here boiled down my profile. In the course of it, those errors crept in which I regret as much as you do. I enjoyed the book." It's shocking!

Riess: It really is.]

Father's Criticism, and Writing

Arnstein: I wrote No End to Morning in the third person. I felt a little self-conscious about writing in the third person because I wasn't too generous to some of my relatives. [laughs] I was very objective as a child. I saw these relatives objectively, as I think few children do. Children mostly accept relatives as relatives, but I didn't. I saw the humor in them, and the ridiculous side of them.

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\*See Appendix E, "Thoughts on Growing Old."

Riess: In your childhood you lived with such fear all the time of not saying the right thing.

Arnstein: Yes. I was absolutely stymied by my father because he was a terrible tease. I must have had intrinsically a love of words-- which is one reason I like poetry. One time I had been to a concert of a singer and I said to my father, "Her voice is unsympathetic." After that he kept saying, "Unsympathetic, unsympathetic," until it just grew out of my ears. I remember definitely I thought I shall never use a word that is not current in the family vocabulary. Well, that stymied me all my young life so that I couldn't talk in public. I was almost struck dumb--but not quite. Anyway, that's what happened.

Then I read Hughes Mearns' first book on work with children.\* My husband was away on business and that night I wrote twelve poems. I said to myself, "If the kids can do this, why can't I?" In some such way, I broke through that inhibition.

The other day I came across a letter from my father, which I will excerpt to you. He was in Europe, he and my mother were travelling, and I had sent several poems to them. I had never written before except once at school when we had to write a sonnet, and then never anything since. In his letter, he wrote, "I was surprised to get your letter, but not altogether because between sleeping and waking I often think of words," and then he says, "that are not in the dictionary, and when I'm fully awake I cannot remember them, so don't take this to your heart. Don't count on this at all." Then he writes, "I'm not criticizing, but you cannot use this, you cannot use that, you cannot say that." He was criticizing, but he denied that he was doing so. He told me to talk it all over with my sister. Well, my sister was a naturalist, very down to earth and practical, and she couldn't have met me on the poetry level at all.

Riess: Just indulge me in a little psychology. What do you think was bothering your father?

Arnstein: First of all, I think I told you the other day that he and my mother were the most ill-mated couple. I think in one sense my father was substituting me for mother, where she failed him.

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\*Hughes Mearns, Creative Youth, How a School Environment Set Free the Creative Spirit, Doubleday, Page & Co., New York, 1925.

Arnstein: He never wanted me to get married. I think he wanted to keep me as, what shall I say, as a substitute for mother, for what I was and mother was not. He was very rude to all the boys that called on me.

I was ambivalent about him. I admired him inordinately, because of his intellect. He was way ahead of his time. He was a "union man" when all the employers, of which he was one, were anti-union. He was in the wholesale wine business, and there was a meeting because the wine-workers wanted to unionize. All the employers voted against it except my father. The next time they came together--I don't know how my father did this, he must have been very astute, but anyway he won them all around and they voted to allow the men to unionize.

Then the coopers, who were the people that made the barrels, struck, and my father wouldn't see the committee that wanted to meet with him. I said to my father, "You always support the unions, why won't you see these representatives?" He said, "Nobody has a prescriptive right to lord over others. They should have come to me first before they struck." I myself had always been for the underdog so he said, "You misjudge me. I am for the unions when they do the right thing." That was the sort of man he was.

Riess: It sounds like a very difficult line for you.

Arnstein: It was a very difficult line for me because I was so ambivalent about him. I admired him, and I really didn't know how I disliked him.

Riess: In No End to Morning you describe all these wonderful character-filled meals at your grandparents' and the loving banter and family arguments that were going on. What were the meals like at your own home with your mother and father, and sister and brother?

Arnstein: The fact that I've had colitis all my life I ascribe to the trouble we always had during dinner. My father, as I told you, was a great tease. He used to tease my brother, who was four years younger than I, to the point where the boy would retaliate, and then Father would say he was impertinent and would send him out of the room without his supper. Once I tried to stand up for him, and my father gave me the treatment--so I never did it again.

Riess: I take it that later on in your life, you did become closer friends?



Arnstein: Well, he used to take me to concerts and to recitals, and we exchanged books and that, but I was always afraid of him. He never laid a hand on me, but I was always frightened of his violent temper, and the sulks that came after.

Riess: It was rather overwhelming for me to read your book. I decided that nothing in life prepares us for life--or something like that.

Arnstein: I've often thought that maybe my own sufferings as a child have made me aware of children, in my teaching. That may be one of the elements that went into it. I would never treat children as I had been treated. I would acknowledge them as people worthy of respect.

Riess: Have you ever thought what you might have been with a different kind of home environment?

Arnstein: No, I really haven't. I think I might have written earlier, because I was storing up words all the time--I didn't even know how to pronounce the words when I began to write because they were words I'd never heard spoken. Sometimes I would accent a word wrong, and I'd have to take it out of the poem. I must have been attracted to words very young and stored them up, so when I really wrote it was like a dam bursting--all came out in a flood. The night I first wrote, I penned twelve poems--I told you--well, that's a dam bursting!

Riess: Yes, and maybe music would not have been as important.

Arnstein: It wouldn't have been. I did keep up my music after I began to write, but in a more desultory way. I don't think I ever expected to be a professional musician. First of all, I didn't have a good ear as compared with that of my cousin. He would stand with his back to the piano, and I would play a note or chords, and he would call out what they were. I never could do that, so that was one very big lack. Another was that I couldn't associate the written sounds that I saw on the paper with my ear.

I never thought I could be a musician, I would play for the love of it. After I began to write a great deal, I didn't play much music anymore. In fact, it's years since I've played.

Riess: Incidentally, did you have music education at the Presidio Open Air school?

Arnstein: Oh, yes.

Riess: Was the idea that every child was--.

Arnstein: Should be exposed to music. Those who could take it, all right, and those who couldn't, all right, too. We had music, art, shop work, and poetry--which the public schools didn't provide and which we felt every child should be exposed to.

Riess: I was curious about whether you thought that every child had the possible gift of music, the way you believe that every child can write?

Arnstein: I think it's a possibility with a great big question mark.

No End to Morning and Some Recent Insights

Riess: You said in the book that "the family was society," and that the family approved of conformity above all things, and yet everyone you describe sounds eccentric.

Arnstein: They were eccentric within a small sphere; none of them did anything that wasn't approved of in society. My thinking wouldn't have been approved of, because I was critical of them. A child being critical of an adult was unheard of; the adult was the "know-all."

Riess: It's a society of adults, first of all?

Arnstein: It was a society of adults, and a very limited society because it was Jewish. As I've said, we never had a gentile at our table in my whole childhood.

Riess: There is a sense in the book of your yearning for your mother, but never really quite having her.

Arnstein: I couldn't trust her. [No End to Morning, pp. 41, 48-52] First of all, I knew she repeated what we had told her to her sisters. I heard her say once that my brother was affectionate but I was not. Well, that just threw me off. Since she thought I wasn't affectionate, I supposed I was not. I accepted the adult picture of me as what I really was.

Riess: Why did you decide to write that book [No End to Morning] when you did?

Arnstein: That I'm going to find hard to answer. I don't know. I had quit teaching school then. [1934?] I think it must have been a sort of psychological desire to expose all this and to get



Arnstein: it out in the open. I realized--I'm trying to think whether I did this after I was writing poetry, yes, I guess I did. I know that the writing of poetry, both for me and the children, externalized troubles, they weren't roiling around inside of us. Maybe the impulse was to write this out so it wouldn't roil around inside of me anymore. I don't know.

Riess: Is it based on diaries kept when you were young?

Arnstein: No, I didn't keep any diaries when I was young. I couldn't remember it now, but when I wrote it--I don't know the date--I remembered it all then. It was after I'd left the school. I wasn't doing anything at the time, I was just writing. [Mrs. Arnstein taught at Presidio Open Air School from 1924 to 1934?, and again from 1940 to 1943?]

Riess: It's amazing that you could recall the detail of family life like that.

Arnstein: I had almost total recall at that time, yes. I couldn't do it today.

Riess: Did you choose to give the characters other names because you felt that there would be some injury to the family if you made it an overt family history?

Arnstein: I felt embarrassed about writing about myself. That's about it, I guess.

Riess: But it's not that you didn't want the other members of the family to know?

Arnstein: No. In fact, I gave the book to the other members of the family.

Riess: Was it easy to write?

Arnstein: It wrote itself practically. In my old home on Clay Street I had an attic room which was not used, and I used to go up there and just write and write and write.

Riess: There's no publication date.

Arnstein: It was never published.

Riess: From the "Amy" character's point of view, when was it written?

Arnstein: Have you got the book? I think it's in the text, there's something given.

Arnstein: Oh yes, "To Amy her world was one blessed with enlightenment, in which wars belonged only to a barbaric past..." [No End to Morning, p. ii] When the Spanish-American war broke out [1898]--that's what they got wrong in that article--I had thought that wars were a thing of the past. I was a child of about twelve, I think, and I was so disillusioned. "The concept of progress and the continuance of peace were as little to be questioned as was the returning light..."

I remember that at the time I was writing the book Edith, my younger daughter, was over at the University of California. She was a "left winger" at that time, and took part in that protest about free speech. [1934] She and another girl and two boys were invited down to San Mateo--do you know about this?

Riess: No, I don't.

Arnstein: --to give the speech that she had given in Berkeley. When she got there, the faculty and the students all threw tomatoes and eggs at them. Two of the students took one boy, took his shoes and drove him away. Edith, in furious protest, went to the police station to report this. When she got there, they told her, "You're arrested." She said, "I'm arrested? I just came to report this." They repeated, "You're arrested."

In some way or another, there was a professor over at the University of California who was in sympathy with all of the protestors. He telephoned to San Mateo and said, "Let these kids go." So the police took them to the border of the town and said, "Get out, and don't come down again."

At that time, I was writing this book upstairs, and my husband called to me. (Edith was our child always except when she got into trouble, and then she was my child. [laughs]) He called to me and said, "Your child has been arrested!" [laughs]

Riess: You referred to your writing, earlier, as like a dam bursting.

Arnstein: My terrors and all that sort of thing relate to my father. I became aware not long ago of characteristics of his which I had repressed. I had written in my little book called Vignettes that my father possessed what I called "Vagaries." They were much more than vagaries. [Vignettes, pp. 59-65]. But I had always played his faults down, never was willing to acknowledge them. They came out then in force, and I realized how much damage he'd done me. The fact that I couldn't listen to music--I don't know if I've told you this?

Riess: No.

Arnstein: For years I hadn't been able to listen to music, on the radio, on television. I gave my gramophone away to my grandson. Suddenly I realized that I associated music with my father. He took me to concerts, he took me to operas, and he liked my playing because he whistled all the tunes I'd played. But he never praised me. I would have given my right eye to have him say, "You did that nicely," or "You played that well." When I realized this, I was able to listen to music again. My daughter gave me a little Sony to hold in my hand, and I now listen to symphonies and concerts.

Riess: That's a great thing to be given back.

Arnstein: Isn't that extraordinary?

Either in the course of this, or because I'm writing this book with Dr. Settlege, I uncovered something else of my childhood which I hadn't remembered at all, which I had repressed. My brother was four years younger than I, and we slept together in single beds, side by side, until I was twelve years old. (When my granddaughter, who is a psychiatrist in the east, heard that, she said, "My God, did they let a twelve year old girl sleep with an eight year old boy?" I said, "We were so innocent, we wouldn't have even touched each other." Maybe we went to sleep holding hands sometimes.)

My brother told stories every night before we went to sleep. The characters in his story were--now this is funny--Jakie Black and Jakie White. My father's name was Jacob, and he was known as Jake. Jakie Black and Jakie White must have represented to my brother the two aspects of my father, the one that was good and the one that was bad.

Another character in his stories was Esel. Esel in German means an ass, and as I told you, when my father wanted to get back at my mother he'd say, "Your son is just like your brothers." Since he thought of her brothers as asses, my brother was an ass then, too.

Riess: That's a fascinating analysis. Did you talk to your brother about your childhood when you were writing your book?

Arnstein: Oh, no. My brother was very reactionary. He admired my father inordinately, and yet he was absolutely the opposite of him. My husband was of a very equable disposition, and one day my brother said to me, when we were lunching together, "I just can't stand the way he sits there so superior." I said, "He's not superior, you're misunderstanding him." He said, "Why?" "He just doesn't want to fight, and you always want to."

Arnstein: When anything displeased my brother he'd say, "It makes me so damn mad." He never could be dispassionate. In fact, I said to him one time, "Don't you believe in democracy?" He said, "What do you mean?" "Don't you believe every man has a right to his opinion? We have a Democratic party and a Republican party."

He never accepted what I said, so I never could talk to him. It's always been that he has never been able to reconcile two sides of things, never could believe there was good and bad in the world. It had to be all good, otherwise it was all bad.

Riess: Would your parents talk to you about your brother or your brother about you?

Arnstein: Yes, they did. This is another thing that happened: My brother, when we were sleeping together, had night fears. He'd wake and say, "There's a man in the room." We had candlelight then. My mother would only allow candles to be used. (My husband when he was a boy had been nearly asphyxiated when they put in gas. He had turned the cock on one night without lighting it and was just saved by his nurse who heard his groaning. She took him and hung him out the window. Well, from that moment on--. And this was widely known.)

I would take a candle and go into the corner where my brother said there was a person, and I'd say, "You see, there's nobody here." He'd say, "Oh, he went to the other corner." Then, I'd go to the other corner. "Well, he's here somewhere," he'd say. One time my father came in and spanked him. I was infuriated, because the boy was just frightened.

Then my father, believing that my mother was coddling my brother, making a baby of him because he cried, decided to send him to a military school. [No End to Morning, pp. 40-44] He went over to San Rafael where there was such a school, and enrolled my brother. My mother was heartbroken. My father told me about this, and I thought maybe it was a good thing to get my brother away from him for a while, so I didn't say anything. Then my mother came to me, and said, "If Dad talks to you about sending your brother over there, you tell him you don't think it's a good idea." Which I did. My father just gave me one look, and he knew what had happened, and I was then in Coventry for ten days again.

Riess: That Coventry! Actually, it's too bad that your father, with his terror of burglars, didn't have any sympathy for your brother who was afraid of dark things in the corner.

Riess: Oh, don't you want to go back and have a conversation with your father and just stand up to him?

Arnstein: No, because I think he was a very unhappy man. As I see him now, he was a man who was unfulfilled. He wrote the most beautiful letters you can imagine, in a distinguished style. He subscribed to the New York Herald Tribune and the New York Times all his life, and he read them cover to cover every day. He would write answers sometimes on controversial subjects, and he would read them to me, but he would never send them. What he did with them, I don't know. I think he must have destroyed them. He was a frustrated writer for one thing, and frustrated in his marriage, and frustrated in my brother. He was apprehensive: if his business wasn't good, or when it was good, he felt it was going to be bad.

I couldn't go back and accuse him because now as I see it, the older I get the more I realize that people are the result, very often, of circumstances over which they have no control.



## MARRIAGE

Lawrence Arnstein, the Right Values

Riess: Let's get your husband's courtship of you up to date.

Arnstein: Shortly after the earthquake Lawrie started his business in Oakland. A while before that, one of his college friends--at Berkeley--had rung him up and asked if he'd subscribe to something that the Berkeley people were planning. Lawrie said, "Yes." This man said, "You know, you're the only person that hasn't given me an alibi? Anything you ever ask of me I'll say 'Yes' to."

Now this is a funny coincidence: Lawrie wanted to get back to San Francisco to tell his father about what he had done in Oakland, and you couldn't get over to San Francisco without a permit. He was waiting at the ferry, and along came this man from Berkeley and said, "What are you doing here?" Lawrie said, "I want to get across the bay." His friend said, "You remember what I told you? Anything you want, I'll do for you. There's a general that's going across the bay in a car, I'll get a seat for you in it."

So Lawrie crossed the bay in the general's car. Of course, when he reached San Francisco he had to walk to where my mother-in-law and father-in-law were staying. My father-in-law said, "How'd you get here?" Lawrie said, "In a general's car." My father-in-law threw his hands in the air and said, "Can't you ever be serious about anything?" Lawrie said, "I am serious, I did come in a general's car!"

After four years I suddenly awoke to the fact that this man who was courting me was in every way that I could conceive of different from my father. Where my father was apprehensive, he had no fears. Where my father had a terrible temper, he had



Arnstein: a most equable disposition. Everything that my father was he was the opposite of. My father was literary, he wasn't. My father was musical, he wasn't. None of that seemed to matter to me.

This is an interesting thing: my grandson Eric, my eldest daughter's son, asked my husband after we'd been married for long years, "How did you and Granny ever come together? You're such different kinds of people." My husband said, "That's what makes it interesting. She tells me about what she's doing, I tell her what I'm doing." Well, Eric wasn't satisfied with that answer because he asked me the same question several weeks later. I said, "I can answer you in one word." He said, "What's that?" I said, "We have the same values. What's important to me is important to him and the other things don't matter."

Riess: Was he much older than you?

Arnstein: Five years, he was born in 1880.

Riess: In that four year period before you accepted him did you mature a lot on your own? What were you doing?

Arnstein: I was going east and studying music and having various experiences here. I did mature somewhat, and as I say, I came into the sense of my own values and realized how they differed from my father's.

My husband said to me once later in life, "Aren't you glad that I'm the persistent sort? Maybe if I hadn't been we never would have been married." I said, "Has it ever occurred to you that if you hadn't been so persistent I might have married you earlier?" He said, "No, it never occurred to me." [laughs]

Riess: How did your marriage change your relationship with your parents?

Arnstein: I really don't know. I know that I thought of my father as the archetype of man, and that's what had inhibited me in my relationship to my husband, until I discovered that he was quite opposite from my father.

Riess: After you were married, did you continue to feel like a child?

Arnstein: No. Once my father started in to tease my children, as he had teased us all, and I said to him--that's the only time I talked back to him--"Father, if you tease the children I'm never going to bring them to see you." And he never did after that. He was very devoted to my girls, and they to him, particularly my eldest daughter.

Arnstein: Both my mother and father thought if I married at all I should marry a prince or somebody up in the sky, because they had me on a pedestal. Anybody that I would have married would have been not good enough for them.

Honeymoon Tales, 1910

Riess: Lengthening Days ends where you go off on your honeymoon. You went to Baden Baden?

Arnstein: No, we went to Carlsbad. We went there because on our honeymoon we visited Tante Adele. She was an aunt of my husband's, sister of my father-in-law. She lived in a little town called Fürth which is near Munich. [Vignettes, pp. 1-6]

The way they entertained you in Germany in those days-- I don't know if they do it still--was to feed you. We'd be given a huge breakfast, a huge midday meal with mutton which we hated, then a Kaffee Klatsch in the afternoon with all kinds of coffee cake, and then a big dinner in the evening.

After all this overeating, when I got to Venice I had a terrible attack of gastritis. My husband toured Venice. I went to the Lido one day, and that was the last time I got out. I secured a doctor, a German recommended by the hotel, and I think he knew just as much about my illness as he did about English because he said one day, "You can have a slight tea tomorrow." I don't think he had the faintest idea what was the matter with me, but he said, "You had better go and get a cure at Carlsbad," and that's how I happened to go there. Carlsbad was a charming place. There was a little operetta house that played "The Merry Widow," and all the Franz Lehar things at that time.

One night we made a beautiful trip in a wagon with a horse, a few lights on the side of the wagon, through the woods. (This is interesting: the woods there in Germany were set out like orchards, there was no underbrush and things, you could just see the trees in line. I told this to my grandson the other day, and he said, "Absolutely, the forests were planted by the state. They were arranged like orchards.") We went there at night to have dinner beside a little running river. Then we came home through the "orchard" again with the lights on the wagon, and in the moonlight. It was so beautiful, I was so impressed by it, and I thought, "This is the essence of this place."

Riess: How long was the honeymoon?

Arnstein: We left here in April and came back in August, I think.

Riess: What did they do for you at the spa? I've never understood what a cure is. [Vignettes, pp. 8-12]

Arnstein: This is very funny. You get there in the morning and the first thing you do is you go to a doctor and give him the diagnosis from your doctor and he decides what your cure will be. This consists of taking certain waters, and what was prescribed for me, mud packs.

What happened was, you got up in the morning and went to the Kur Saal, the "cure hall." It's a long hall that is roofed, and people are walking up and down with cups in their hands. Along the nave there are stairs that descend and rise, circularly, and girls are standing on different stairs. At the bottom of the stairs are spigots pouring water. I, being a skeptic, thought that it was the same water at every spigot. [laughs] Anyway, the girls give you your cup, then you walk up and down and sip from it slowly.

On this trip I met Mr. [Alfred] Hertz, who was the head of the symphony orchestra in San Francisco. He recognized me, and he gave me a wink. I saw him flick some of his water over the edge, and he gave me the wink not to say anything about it.

I walked up and down until my cup was empty, and then I gave it to a woman at the end of the hall. She put it, with my name on it, on a shelf. That remained my cup for the whole time there.

We'd go out to breakfast and go to a patisserie where there were the most marvelous cakes and cookies and we'd choose anything we wanted because I wasn't on a diet. We chose the fanciest cakes and got a cup of coffee from the open air stall and had our breakfast.

After breakfast I went home, as I was supposed to lie down in bed. Presently a woman came carrying a big package. She didn't speak German or English, but she motioned me to get undressed, which I did. She opened the package and put a rubber pad on my stomach. Then she poured hot mud on me, which was very pleasant, warm and soothing. She left the pad there a while. Then she took it off, saying "Auf wiedersehen," and she left.

Arnstein: That was the last of the prescribed medication all day; the rest of the time I was quite free. My husband and I enjoyed the little operettas in the evening. Evidently it was customary for people to take an after lunch rest, so the streets were all empty at that time. I said to my husband, "I guess this is the siesta. Let's go in and rest," but we didn't feel like resting.

There was a little band--they have these bands in Germany in the small towns--"oomph oomph oomph boom boom." The playing was terrible! I hitched up my dress on one side, put on my husband's hat and did a cakewalk with him. He just laughed himself sick! [laughter]

There was a store there called the Wiener Werkstatt. It was the new handcraft work that was started in Vienna, and there was a branch in Carlsbad. That's where I bought a beautiful silver tea set with the money my uncle had given me for our wedding, and bought some things for my husband, too. I remember the clerk there said to my husband, "Shall I bill you for less than the cost? Then you won't have to pay so much duty." My husband was horrified at this deceit. He said, "No, of course not."

Riess: I didn't think Alfred Hertz came to San Francisco until after the Exposition.

Arnstein: I don't remember when he came.

Riess: But you knew him?

Arnstein: I knew him by sight mostly, but when we got to Carlsbad--. My husband had a cousin who wanted to be an opera singer. He came to me and said, "You know Dr. Hertz, don't you?" I said, "Well, I know him by sight." He said, "Would you ask him to give me a hearing? I would like to know what he thinks about my voice."

I hesitated to do this. I didn't want to ask favors of Mr. Hertz when I didn't know him. But I thought, "I'm interfering with this boy's whole life, so maybe I'll ask Mr. Hertz." He was very agreeable and said, "Yes, bring him up to my place and I'll listen to him." He did this, and what he said was interesting. "You're a baritone. If you were a tenor it wouldn't matter anything about your size, you could be little or big, fat or small. But baritones have to be large and imposing, and you'll never make it, you're too small." That was what he told him. [laughs]



Married Woman

Riess: Where did you settle when you came back from your wedding trip?

Arnstein: My father had bought a house on Pacific Avenue and we lived there until we found a house of our own, later on, on Cherry Street. Both my girls were born there.

Riess: Did your husband have resources so that you could live comfortably?

Arnstein: He was working in his father's wholesale woolen business. I wanted him to get out of it. He disliked it because he wasn't interested in woolens, or merely in making money. His interest was in public health. He refused to leave the business because he said, "My father needs me and I can't go." When his father died I said, "Now you can leave." He said, "No I can't." He was a very compassionate man. He said, "We've had clerks in this business for years and years, and if I go out they'll be on the streets. They're elderly people, they'll never get jobs, and I couldn't do that to them." So he wouldn't leave.

Then came the Second World War. He discussed going out of business with both my brothers-in-law and they said, "This is the time to get out because everybody can get a job now." The older people could because the younger ones were going off to war. He left then, and turned to his old interest in public health. His career in this field began at sixty, and mine in teaching began at forty.

Riess: Did you have servants?

Arnstein: Yes. We had two servants, which was absurd. I was a helpless person. I had never been taught to do anything and I was embarrassed because these people were older than I, and I didn't like to give them orders.

Riess: How did that all work out? How did you learn?

Arnstein: I don't remember, except I remember that after the Second World War, when you couldn't get any maids, I had to learn to cook. I had to ask my girls because both my girls knew how.

Riess: You had been brought up not to concern yourself about money.

Arnstein: Yes. My father thought it was crude to talk about money, you never mentioned money. We had four in help, so we lived, not ostentatiously, but very comfortably. My father always acted

Arnstein: as if we lived frugally. He objected to people who went out to dinner because he said, "If they've got all these servants at home, why are they going out to dinner?"

Riess: After you were married you had to deal with the realities of life, and money. Did you take that on, or did your husband do it?

Arnstein: I imagine he did it, I don't remember. He used to say I had a floating decimal point. I never knew the difference between ten or a hundred dollars. [laughs]

Riess: Did you hire your servants?

Arnstein: No. My mother and my mother-in-law did.

Riess: Did you telephone your mother every day?

Arnstein: No, but when she got older, when I was at the [Presidio Open Air] school, I went to see her every afternoon when she didn't have other company. Our relationship had changed. In a sense I became her mother. She was frail and had a heart condition which they diagnosed as "a tired heart" in those days, whatever that meant.

Riess: A touching way of putting it, isn't it?

Arnstein: Yes. She came to see me the day before she died. I had my eldest grandson with me as an infant. His mother and father were in the east, and they had left him with me. She came to see him on a Sunday before lunch. I had just put him to nap, and I told her that I couldn't wake him up.

The next morning she phoned me and said, "Will you call the doctor for me? I've been sick all night." I called the doctor but he wasn't available. Then I also called the maid. My mother was living at the Mark Hopkins Hotel and she had a suite with a dining room and a kitchen, and the maid cooked for them.

The maid had her own telephone, so I rang her up and said, "My mother tells me she's been sick. Do you think I should come down?" I said, "I don't want to alarm her." She said, "No, I don't think you need to come down." Then a few minutes later she phoned me, "I think you had better come." When I arrived there, she was dead. I closed her eyes. The substitute doctor came, and gave her a shot and then she had some kind of a reaction. I said, "Oh, she's alive!" He said, "No, that was just a reflex."



Riess: Your father lived on after her?

Arnstein: My father lived on, I think, twelve years after she died. He was always complaining, when he was a younger man, and she always said, "I'll die before you."

Riess: Did he continue to live at the Mark Hopkins?

Arnstein: I suggested to the doctor that he be sent to a smaller apartment, "Where he won't be reminded of my mother all the time." He said, "It's not a good idea to move older people." He lived on, I think, to ninety-three, but he was senile for three years. I went to see him almost every day, but he always reproached me, "You never come to see me, you neglect me."

### Children

Riess: You had a child within the first year of your marriage?

Arnstein: I was married in April, and Ethel was born in April of the next year. I think she must have been conceived while I was in Europe. I know when I got to New York it was terribly hot in August, and my husband said, "You don't need to stay in customs. Why don't you go to the hotel and get cooled off, and I'll take care of it." I remember a funny thing happened: the customs officer held up what was called a "corset cover," a little embroidered garment that you wore over your corset. He held it up and said, "What's this?" and my husband said, "Search me, I'm just married." [laughs]

Riess: Were you sick during your pregnancies?

Arnstein: I had headaches, but I'd had headaches all my life. I was taking medicine prescribed by a friend who was a dentist and later became a dental surgeon. When I told my obstetrician of it, he said, "Oh, don't take that, that's not good for you." I told this to my friend and he sent me another prescription which I did take. I don't know what it was, but I used it only for a little while. I had a normal birth.

I remember writing a poem just before Ethel's birth, and thinking, "How strange!" Ordinarily you decide matters, but this is life and I have no control over it, it's coming.

Riess: When do you think that you really "grew up" in a way? Was that a watershed, to have a baby?



*Above left, Mrs. Lawrence  
Arnstein, April 17, 1910*

*Above right, with daughter  
Ethel, 1911*

*Photographs by  
Frances Thompson*

*Left, Mr. and Mrs. Arnstein,  
with Ethel*





Arnstein: I don't think so really. I don't think I grew up until I began to work and write. I was a terribly innocent person as I told you, repressed.

Riess: Having the babies was still part of a kind of a childhood of your life?

Arnstein: All I remember of the children is that I used to come home always apprehensive that something had happened to them while I was gone because, you see, of having lost two brothers during my own childhood. That's all I remember.

Riess: Did they have a nursemaid of their own?

Arnstein: Yes, we always had a nurse. My eldest daughter was allergic to cow's milk, and nobody knew of allergies at that time. Dr. Langley Porter, of the Langley Porter Clinic, was her pediatrician. Every time I took the baby to him he'd change her whole formula. I, myself, thought it was not a good idea to make such a radical change. My mother-in-law was all for my having a wet nurse. That was not common in those days, and I resisted her suggestion.

One day, coming home from the meeting with the doctor on the ferry boat, I noticed the child was absolutely grey. I thought to myself, "Well, I'm going to have a wet nurse anyway. Nothing can be worse than this." The child prospered, overnight! When she was nine months old the nurse became sick and had to leave. The child was a chubby baby then.

Riess: That's lovely.

Arnstein: When the second baby came along I had another doctor, and I made up my mind I would not go through this feeding business again. He couldn't find anything that agreed with the baby. I had a Danish nurse and she said, "If you let me feed this baby, I'll get her all right." Well, I thought it couldn't be worse, so I said, "On this condition: if you feed her, I want to know just what you're giving her." So she fed her.

I wanted to get her back on cow's milk after she was getting along and I said, "It's time to put her on cow's milk." "All right," the nurse said, "I'll give her one bottle of cow's milk a day." She did so and the baby became terribly sick.

I said, "Now you do it my way. I did it yours, now you do it mine. Put one teaspoon of cow's milk in her daily formula, and take out one teaspoon of the formula. Do that one by one a day." This gradual adjustment was successful and by the time the baby was on cow's milk, she was fine. Then, the nurse put applesauce in everything solid she ate! [laughs]

Riess: How did it work with the wet nurse? Did she come four times a day or something?

Arnstein: No, she lived in our place. She had lost her baby at birth.

Riess: Did you become involved with her as a person at all?

Arnstein: Not really. I think I must have resented her a little bit. I couldn't nurse my first baby. I developed an abcess in my breast, and the doctor said, "No more nursing," and he took me off the breastfeeding entirely, so I knew I couldn't nurse the second baby either.

Riess: But you did try?

Arnstein: Yes, I did try with the first baby.

Riess: Was that unusual?

Arnstein: I can't remember.

Riess: Did your mother nurse her children?

Arnstein: I don't remember.

Riess: Who were your good friends, married women friends then?

Arnstein: The friends I mentioned before. One had married a cousin of my husband's. [Alice Sussman Arnstein] The other two girls were my husband's elder sisters. [Helen Salz, Gertrude Wollenberg]

Riess: And you were all young mothers together?

Arnstein: Yes, gradually.

Riess: That's what I'm interested in.

Arnstein: I had a baby first, and then my oldest sister-in-law had her baby, and then it alternated every year. I had Edith, and then she had her son Andrew.

Riess: When you got together, did you talk about babies?

Arnstein: Yes, we did. I think we were pretty conventional. I don't remember much.

Riess: I think of Helen Salz trying to find time and room in her life for her painting and art.

Arnstein: She did later on, yes.

Riess: But not in the early days?

Arnstein: No, though as a girl she took up painting, and had been to New York and studied under [Robert] Henri.

### Social and Musical Life

Riess: What were the conventions of getting together? Did you have "at homes"?

Arnstein: No, that was my mother's era.

Riess: As a young, married woman, what was your social life? Did you play cards?

Arnstein: We never played cards. Neither my husband nor I played cards. I think I didn't learn to play on purpose because I didn't want to be called in to the card parties at my mother's.

Riess: What did you and your husband do on weekends?

Arnstein: Before we were married, we walked up Mt. Tamalpais a lot. After we were married, let's see, what did we do? I don't know, except he played golf.

Riess: Did you continue to take music lessons after you were married?

Arnstein: I played music, I didn't take lessons. I played four hands with my old music teacher. Later on I played quartets and trios with professionals; the best were the [Stanislaus] Bems.

Riess: How come the Bems wanted you to play with them? What was that arrangement?

Arnstein: Four of us girls got together, who had previously played two pianos, eight hands. We thought we'd like to play trios. Each of us would prepare one. The Bems were then playing at the Palace Hotel at night, but we arranged to play in the daytime, and each one of us would prepare a trio and play, four of us in succession.

Riess: Did you play with Ansley Salz?



Arnstein: I didn't like to, I never had much regard for him as a musician. I did play with my old music teacher, Miss Godchaux, four-hand piano music, until she became fairly old.

Riess: At some point you were living in Piedmont. Why was that? And where?

Arnstein: When the First World War broke out, flu was rampant. I'd had a very bad case which left me with a cough for years. I was sent down to Santa Barbara in the hopes that the climate would cure me, but it did no good. My doctor then thought I had tuberculosis, but tests showed I didn't. There was nothing known about allergies in those days and probably I had an allergy. It was thought that Piedmont would be a better climate than San Francisco. That's how we came to be there the first time. Then we went there one other summer because we liked it--it was a charming place.

Riess: Do you remember where in Piedmont?

Arnstein: The first time we lived opposite the cemetery, and once we were opposite some famous man's place. He had a beautiful garden, and my girls used to dance there.

At Piedmont I started music study with a teacher who later became the teacher of Ethel. I was very glad to be active again because I had been idle for so long. Then we came back to town and stayed at my mother's a while to see whether I would prosper in this climate. It was then that I got my little house on Cherry Street.

Riess: Did you enjoy putting the house together? Did you buy the furniture?

Arnstein: My grandfather gave me money for my bedroom furniture. I don't know who bought it, I think my mother and I did. I imagine my mother and mother-in-law took over. They did in everything else! [laughs]

Riess: Your husband was not in World War I?

Arnstein: No.

## PRESIDIO OPEN AIR SCHOOL

Maria Montessori at the Panama Pacific International Exposition

Riess: What do you recall of the Panama Pacific International Exposition in 1915?

Arnstein: What I recall is that I entered my daughter in the Montessori school there, which was run by a pupil of Maria Montessori. My daughter was very timid, and would not allow me to leave. I had to sit there during the morning.

Riess: She was about three or four?

Arnstein: She was born in 1911, so she was four.

Then Montessori came out here and gave a series of lectures and I attended these, but I was not impressed by her. One of the statements she made was that children were not at all creative, they were just imitative. I knew that wasn't true. Children were creative in their play. Then I realized that she had worked mostly with retarded children, so she didn't know how normal children would react to her method.

I had read in a magazine called McClure's the first article, I think, that came to the United States about Montessori.\* It described her materials, and I was so much interested because it was the first time I had heard of any educator who had equated interest with learning. Learning was always something you threw on people, but interest had nothing to do with it. She equated interest with learning and that intrigued me, so I sent for all her material, and it was extremely interesting. I'll tell you about it. For instance, there would be a little piece of wood painted red, and another piece attached to it painted green, so that you knew that one and one made two.

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\*or Munsey's

- Arnstein: But she would not allow the children to use her material except the way she wanted it used. What happened here was that the little boys who got these sticks wanted to make trains out of them, and she wouldn't allow that. She was very rigid I felt, and I didn't approve of that. As I say, I didn't approve of her attitude towards creativity. The present Montessori schools have changed a lot. I've had great-grandchildren that have gone to them and have done extremely well. But they've become much less rigid.
- Riess: By the time Ethel was four, you were involved in her education in some way?
- Arnstein: I was always interested in education, I think.
- Riess: When do you remember your children becoming interesting to you as individuals?
- Arnstein: They were always interesting to me as individuals.
- Riess: Did you do early stimulus things with them? You know, the way people hang things over cribs now, everything to stimulate and educate.
- Arnstein: Oh no, there was nothing of that sort of thing in my day.
- Riess: Did you have play groups? Did mothers get together and have their children play together?
- Arnstein: Not that I know of.
- Riess: I'm pursuing this relentlessly. Did you play what you would think of now as stimulating learning games with your children?
- Arnstein: I remember when they were older playing games with them. For instance, I'd make up a verse and then tell them to make a verse that rhymed with it.
- Riess: Do you think the nursemaids that you had were creative?
- Arnstein: [laughs] I had the most God-awful nursemaids, because as a child I had had this horrible Maud. I engaged a woman I knew would be kind to the children, and I kept her, but she was just impossibly stupid! She even stole from my sister-in-law and used her name at stores, so I got rid of her ultimately. I was always afraid of my children being ill-treated because I had been so ill-treated. [No End To Morning, pp. 48-52]

Arnstein: Children have no idea! It never occurred to me that Maud might not kill me. Children haven't any sense of reality. I never wanted my children to be in any situation like mine.

Riess: Were you reading any child psychology way back then? Skinner or Watson or any of these people?

Arnstein: Not yet, no.

Arnstein: How come you put Ethel in the Montessori nursery school?

Arnstein: Really because I'd read this article in the McClure's Magazine.

Riess: They just had the nursery school for the year of the exposition?

Arnstein: Yes, while it was on. The woman who ran it later became the head of a very famous school in New York, which also was what they call an "alternative" school today.

#### Presidio Open Air School, Beginnings

[Interview 4: January 30, 1985]

Riess: Before you and Helen Salz started the Presidio Open Air School, where had your children gone to school?

Arnstein: We had been living in Piedmont and when I came back to the city my children were ready for kindergarten. My sister-in-law and I decided that we wanted to give our children more advantages than the public school had to offer, in terms of music and arts and crafts, so we started a little school in her backyard. I have a picture here which I want to show you.

Riess: The private schools weren't doing the kind of teaching that you wanted?

Arnstein: Oh no, nobody was. We started with a kindergarten in the little house in her backyard.

[looking at photograph] Those were the children that were in it at the start. I had two children in the school. Later the Salzes bought the lot behind their home, and they built the larger school there.

Riess: Who were the other original founding families? How did you advertise it?

Arnstein: Well, apparently by hearsay as far as I can remember. They were people we knew who also wanted to put their children in a school that had more advantages.

They built the second school only on one story. It was open air, and the teachers were told to feel the children's hands to see if they were cold, and then close the windows. All were French windows that opened on the yard. In fact, the school got the name of being a school for tubercular children which it wasn't. It was just that we felt that open air was good for children.

We were the first school that even attempted to be what they call an "alternative" school today. We called it a "progressive" school, but progressive got a bad name because people associated it in their minds with complete freedom, which it didn't have at all. We had a very strong superstructure. The children had to learn arithmetic, spelling, and everything they needed to know to go to high school.

Riess: How did you know what you wanted in the school? How did you and Helen know that?

Arnstein: Helen wasn't at all interested in education. She and Mr. Salz did most of the financing—they were fairly wealthy people—and followed me in the educational program.

I had been interested, I told you, in Montessori, and I wanted to have as a principal somebody who knew something of the Montessori background, but who was not restricted by it, who was freer. We engaged an elderly woman, and she recommended Mrs. Beaufait when we enlarged the school. Mrs. Beaufait proved a failure. She had had the background, but she had a poor attitude towards children. My eldest girl had drawn some pictures, and she wanted to have them. My daughter felt that the pictures were hers, she came home crying about it, and I went to Mrs. Beaufait and protested. I said, "After all, this is the child's property, she drew them, they don't belong to the school." So we got rid of Mrs. Beaufait.

Riess: Had she been a student of Montessori, herself?

Arnstein: I don't think she had been a direct student, but she knew about it.

Riess: Was Mrs. Beaufait from San Francisco?



Arnstein: I don't know where she came from originally. She had a girl in the school, and whenever any performance was given she always featured her own child. The children didn't like that, they didn't think that was fair.

Miss Marion Turner

Arnstein: Now here is Miss [Marion] Turner. When we got her, we had by that time a committee [board] of mothers. One of them was Mrs. [James] Whitney, who was the wife of my doctor, Dr. James Whitney. She and I had been friends for many, many years. [see p. 92] We were looking for a principal and she went over to Berkeley where there was a school that had been started by another private person. It was a kindergarten, and it was run by Miss Turner. Mrs. Whitney was so impressed by the fact that the children were allowed a certain amount of autonomy to make their own rules that she said, "We ought to get that teacher, she's really a fine one." We interviewed her, and I was immensely impressed by her. Her whole educational outlook was very congenial to me, and so we engaged her for our school.

Riess: Who had she studied with?

Arnstein: She had been at Columbia and had not studied actually with Dewey, but she'd studied with the Dewey followers--[William] Kilpatrick and other people that were from the Dewey tradition.

Riess: What was the school in Berkeley?

Arnstein: I don't know the name of it. It was a private school.

Riess: Was it also an open air school?

Arnstein: No.

These are just pictures of certain plays that I put on, little operettas. These are some of the things that the children made, figurines, in the art class.

Riess: When Miss Turner was there, how large was the staff? How many grades were there?

Arnstein: I have them here, a picture of them. One, two, three, four, with herself five, six, seven. We never had more than fifteen children in a room. We kept the group small because we wanted to give the children individual attention when they needed it, and we felt that anything larger than that would not make it possible.



Riess: All women teachers?

Arnstein: No, we had a couple of men teachers as well.

Riess: Did you use the men teachers differently? Did they have a different role?

Arnstein: No. Miss Turner was very liberal and flexible. Though she embraced the Dewey tradition, she never imposed it on her teachers. She allowed them to progress on their own. She had weekly meetings with us in which she talked about the Dewey program, but she never interfered with the teachers. Her only requirement of them was a right attitude towards children. Everything else they could do on their own, provided, of course, the children were learning.

Tests were given once a year and a document on each child was contributed to by each special teacher--art, music, and the grade teacher. These were sent to the parents. They were the only things in the way of report cards.

Riess: When she tested, was it a standardized test?

Arnstein: Yes, she gave the Binet-Simon test, and a whole lot of others.

Riess: Other than that, were the parents called in at any time?

Arnstein: Yes, she had parent meetings. However, she was a very shy person; she suffered terribly over parent meetings because she didn't feel right about talking in public.

Riess: Did Marion Turner remain out here beyond the period when she was the principal of the school?

Arnstein: We were friends for many years, really until she began to become senile, three years before she died. She had extreme arthritis. She was crippled; her hands were closed like this. She had only the use of one finger, I think. She could hardly walk.

During those last three years she was down at the rest home in Portola Valley. I used to visit her every two weeks or so, but I was very distressed when I came home, because we didn't have the same old association. She wasn't there. We had used to discuss education, and children, and what not. We were very congenial, but all that was gone. In fact, I still dream about her as a young person now, as we were when we were friends.

Riess: Did she ever marry?

Arnstein: No. I think she was attractive to men. We never discussed that to any extent. My husband used to take her out to movies once in a while when I didn't want to go. He was very friendly with her, too. In fact, when she started the child care centers in San Francisco, she came to him for advice. He told her how to proceed in setting them up.

Riess: That's what she did after she left the school?

Arnstein: After she left the school, she started all these child care centers for working mothers. In fact, she was then teaching down at City College, and my husband had been a friend with the dean of City College, so he gave her a letter to him saying that she would like to discuss setting up child care centers, and training women to run them.

When she talked to him he said, "All right," she could do it. And [laughing] she said to me, "You'll take care of the children when the mothers bring them." I said, "Kindergarten children?" She said, "Yes." I said, "I've never taught kindergarten children. I don't know how to teach them." She replied, "You'll do it. I have to buy toys, and you'll just do it." She took me with her every day, and for the summer I worked with the children and she worked with the parents. Then when the war actually broke out and the women began working, they had some place to put their children.

Riess: Did you remain associated with it?

Arnstein: With the child care program, no, I had nothing to do with that. My sister was one of the teachers at one time, but I wasn't.

## TEACHING CREATIVELY

"Merry Town" and Other Great Ideas

Arnstein: The parents were very supportive of the school in the main. [laughing] In one case they were not. I was teaching the second graders. One day it was raining and the children couldn't go out to play in the yard, and so I started making a little paper house. The children became so interested, they all wanted to make paper houses. So--oh, by the way, this book is called Dear Harriet and it's a book about the school.

Riess: I've seen a copy of that.

Arnstein: Oh, you have? Very good, then I won't give it to you. Well, then you know about the story about the houses. [Dear Harriet, pp. 128-133] We got a table from somewhere in the school to provide for a city. The children called it "Merry Town," and elected a mayor and established a post office. It was a very fine project. One thing grew out of the other. I wanted people from the city fire department to come and explain how that was operated, and then from the police department. I remember one man told about how since they had inaugurated the arrangement of having children at the crossings [crossing guards] there had never been an accident. That sort of thing.

Riess: What was the problem for the parents?

Arnstein: One of the parents came to me and said. "My child tells me all you do at school is play." Another said, "My child says you do nothing but have discussions here." I felt there was a need to explain what was actually happening.

I thought I should invite the parents and tell them what the school was doing. The children and I spent a lot of time in discussing and planning a program. It ended up by each

Arnstein: child describing how they did arithmetic, spelling, and writing. Their writing was placed on the wall, dated so they could trace how they were improving. Then we presented what the children called "Merry Town," and each child participated in describing some aspect of it. So the parents were really apprised of what was going on in an educative way.

Riess: It sounds like there would be a possibility that the children could end up feeling defensive about this institution that they enjoyed every day.

Arnstein: I don't think so. The children seemed to be relaxed.

Riess: But if the parents would say to them at home, "Now, what did you do today?"

Arnstein: I asked the parents not to check up on children. They don't like it for one thing, and sometimes they don't remember what they did.

Riess: I was asking you about that man teacher.

Arnstein: I don't remember this first one at all. I do remember another. I was called back to the school after I had retired, when Miss Turner left, because the man teacher in the eighth grade had too many children to handle, and he wasn't making a good job of it. The then principal called me and said, "Would you come in and take over?" I said, "I've never started a class without a good deal of preparation, I have had no preparation now." She said, "Well, come on, and play it by ear."

So I went to the children, and I said, "Now, you know we'll do our regular work, arithmetic and all, but how about the social studies? What would you like to study?" They said they would like to study San Francisco. That opened up a big field. There was one funny story related to that: On one occasion I paired the children, two and two, to ride in a given streetcar to the end of the line and back, noting on the way what places they passed through, and what was characteristic of them.

Mrs. Rosekrans, who was Spreckels--you know her? John Rosekrans, he's in the newspaper all the time--she rang me up and said, "I don't approve of this at all. I send my children to school to learn and not to be traipsing around the city. I don't want John to be going out tomorrow. I want him to learn." I said, "Mrs. Rosekrans, this is part of our learning procedure. If you would come and visit us I think you would understand."

Arnstein: She said, "I won't let John go." "Well," I said, "He will have to stay here with another class, because I'm going with the children."

John must have protested, because he came. She sent him to school every day in a fancy automobile because she was always afraid he was going to be kidnapped. Another time she said he could go on an outing if I took him in my car. I had him sitting in front with me, but I forgot all about what she had told me. I had planned to visit various districts and allow the children, two by two, to explore them. When we got to the Italian district I sent John off with another boy. Then I suddenly thought, "Oh, if anything happens to that boy after I've been entrusted with him, what will I do?" [laughs] Fortunately, he came back unscathed. [laughs]

Riess: That was such a wonderful project.

Arnstein: Yes, it was a wonderful project.

The children wrote a play which dealt with the Spanish beginning of San Francisco. I have pictures of that in here. The play became part of a very big school project, which centered around the story of the "Pied Piper." My class wrote the general outline. Each class contributed. For instance, the kindergarten acted the "Jongleur de Notre Dame." One of the little boys was the juggler, and juggled before the Virgin-- and then he dies. The odd part of that was, when I told his mother that his acting was extraordinary, she said he hadn't any idea of what the whole thing was about. I said, "Well, he has an instinct for acting." He became an actor in later years, was in the movies in Italy.

#### Helping the Children; Erik Erikson

Riess: Who is that?

Arnstein: It was Frank Wolff. He committed suicide ultimately. He had been married three times and the marriages had gone sour on him. His sister, Carla, who is on the television now, was in my class. In fact, all of the Wolff children except the youngest were in my class at one time or another.

Carla was an antagonistic child. She came to kindergarten with a stick in her hand. She never used it, but there it was. One day her mother came with a cat in her arms. I said, "What's



Arnstein: the cat doing here?" She said, "Carla wanted to bring it to school, and I thought the teacher would handle the situation better than I." I said, "Do you know what you're doing?" She said, "What?" I said, "You're spoiling that child terribly." She said, "What do you mean?" She was a doctor, and I think that because she was away all day she compensated at night by letting the child smoke cigarettes, and drink cocktails with guests.

Erik Erikson was in the city around that time, and I had a room in his office, in his suite, in exchange for doing a little bit of secretarial work, answering the phone and the doorbell. I said to Carla's mother, "You have a great opportunity here. Your child is really very troubled." (I had lunch with the children who brought bag lunches. That was one of the most educative hours for me because the children talked freely, and I knew where they were. Carla came dressed in a boy's shirt and jeans before any girls wore them. One day at lunch she said, "I just hate being a girl." I said, "Well, Carla, maybe there are some aspects of being a girl that you don't know about." She said, "Don't give me that, that's what I get at home!")

I told her mother, since she was so troubled, to take her to Erikson, who dealt with children. I asked Erikson later on, "What's the matter with Carla." He said, "Nothing." I said, "What do you mean, nothing?" He said, "Well, she only hates her mother." [laughs]

Carla came to see me in recent years. She had married again, a Mexican. She had a little girl, by her first husband, in the school. A black lady came to interview me about something, I don't know what, and she told me that her child and Carla's were great friends. I said, "Tell Carla to come to see me. We were always on good terms and I've never seen her since she's back." She'd been back two years or more.

Carla came one day and among other things said, "I don't want to be bitchy about my mother but--." "Now wait a minute, Carla," I said, "I raised two daughters, and as I look back at some of the things I did, I feel they were wrong. I did the best I knew at the time. I tried, and your mother doubtless did, too." She said, "Well, you at least acknowledge you did wrong." I said, "How is it that you've never come to see me? We've always been on good terms." She said, "I've cut out my whole childhood. It doesn't exist for me. I don't see my sister, my brother, my mother, anybody, or anybody connected with my childhood."



Arnstein: Well, she's on the air, on television, giving advice to people who ring her up about their troubles with their children. Believe it or not, she's a psychologist, and she hasn't solved her own problem.

Riess: It's interesting that Erikson let her go in that way.

Arnstein: It wasn't a question of him letting her go. I guess her mother didn't want to go to him anymore.

Riess: Tell me more about working with Erikson.

Arnstein: He was a very absent-minded man, and never told me when he went out or when he was coming back. I was supposed to answer the phone when people rang up, and I never was able to tell them when he would return. [laughs]

I had hoped to be working with disturbed children he was treating at Mt. Zion Hospital, but he decided he wasn't going to work with children any longer, only with adults. I was frustrated by that, but he did show me some work of one of his patients. He constructed play set-ups for my three grandsons, and interpreted them for me.

Riess: Had he written his book on the stages of life? [Childhood and Society, 1950]

Arnstein: That I wouldn't know. I'm very bad on dates. You'll find that out.

Riess: Did you talk with him about any of his developmental ideas?

Arnstein: No, I didn't.

Jenkins: I had read that you were coaching children in that room.

Arnstein: Yes, I was coaching children. They were recommended by word of mouth.

Riess: Coaching them in what?

Arnstein: I went down to the board of education and asked for their recommendations for helping children who were having difficulty in their school studies. The woman who interviewed me said, "Oh, we need this so badly. What are your qualifications?" I told her, "I have a hundred percent no qualifications!" I had left school at fourteen and never graduated even from kindergarten. [laughs] "The board of education can't use you; it's against the law."

Riess: So you taught privately?

Arnstein: I did privately. I don't know how the people came to me, except by word of mouth.

Riess: That was after you had left the Presidio Open Air School?

Arnstein: Yes.

Riess: Well, you certainly must have had a reputation that was good.

Arnstein: Some people knew of me--they knew that I'd worked with their children--and they recommended me. I had one little girl that was an actress. She acted in a play here. This was at the time of Hitler. [to her daughter Edith] Do you remember the name of the play? Tomorrow the World or something like that?

Jenkins: Yes, that was it.

Arnstein: That little girl went to a school in New York for performing children--I didn't know there was such a thing. The child was anxious not to fall behind in her school work. She did extremely well with me. She was a brilliant little girl. Her mother said she was so sorry she had not heard of me sooner. We had only a few sessions.

Riess: Thinking of Carla, maybe it doesn't work to have both a progressive home life and a progressive school life.

Arnstein: I don't really know. I think most of the children had reservations about their parentage. I just now finished an extraordinary book called Mothers and Daughters. Also, there was an article that a friend brought me from a magazine published by Radcliffe College. This number was devoted to parents--mothers and children. In it there were articles by the mothers and by their daughters, and one by the granddaughter of Freud, in which she talked about her three mothers. Her first mother, her biological mother, didn't meet certain of her needs. So she turned to a second mother who was an aunt on her mother's side. The third mother was the granddaughter of Freud [sic].

Every case gave the two sides, and it's evident that the relationship between mother and daughter is a very "iffy" one. We all of us have resented things in our mothers. I did. Though my mother was a dear woman, kindly and warm, there were things she did that I resented. I refused to confide in her because I knew she was talking things over with my aunts. What the mother's childhood relations were, who knows; each child is different, I suppose.

Riess: Did it happen in more cases than Carla's that the mother would somehow hope the school would take major responsibility for child rearing?

Arnstein: Yes. One of the mothers came to the school with her daughter during the Hitler era. The child had been in a public school, and the teacher had pointed to her and said, "If this little girl were in Germany today, she wouldn't be sitting with us, she'd be sitting over there." The mother was so outraged by this remark that she brought the child to our school, but she was in bad shape for a long while. I really got her a little bit straightened out.

### Flora Arnstein's Creative Teaching

Arnstein: In the book [Dear Harriet], you'll see I've given not only evidence where the favorable surroundings were conducive to changes in the children, but I've also shown cases where they weren't, because I think it's only fair to show both sides of the picture. There were certain children that didn't respond, either because they had been injured too early, or because certain things have been so deeply established that they can't be handled.

Riess: When did you start working with Olga Bridgman, and getting your own training?

Arnstein: I didn't really get any training. Mrs. Whitney and I went over to Berkeley together to several lectures. One was Bridgman. One was Jean Macfarlane.

Riess: About when would that have been? Can you recall? Before the war, for instance?

Arnstein: I don't remember, really.

Riess: Was it while your own children were young enough to benefit?

Arnstein: No, my oldest girl must have graduated from the school, because she was there only a year.

Riess: As a kind of psychologist yourself, were you working from instinct, or were you working from training or exposure that you were getting to other thinking?

Arnstein: I think both played a role. I think instinctively I had a feeling for children, particularly for disturbed children. That is something I can't explain. I just was able to make a rapport with the disturbed children, that other teachers couldn't handle.

You know the story in there about the rubbers and all that. How much of it was psychology, I don't know. I never felt myself a psychologist. If I had been younger, when this would have been possible, I would have liked to have been a child psychologist. I think I would have made a good one because just recently I was talking in our group about some children, and one of the young men, a psychologist, said to me, "You ought to be a psychologist." I said, "Well, I wanted to be." I couldn't, so I've never ascribed that to myself.

Riess: It sounds like you weren't afraid of the problems.

Arnstein: No. I was never afraid of children, as so many adults are. They're afraid of what children might do.

I'll tell you a funny instance. My two grandsons graduated from grammar school in mid-year, and my daughter didn't want to put them in the high school until the regular term came around in the fall. She said to me, "Will you coach them for six months?" I said, "Well, I'll do it in the mornings, but not all day." She said, "All right."

The boys were very competitive; they were twins. I thought I'd like to dilute this competitiveness by having some other children in the group. I asked the dean at the U.C. medical school whether he had any children in his practice who couldn't go to school but wanted to keep up with their school work, and could they join us? He said, "You're not going to teach your own grandchildren, are you?" I said, "Yes, why not?" He said, "Well, won't they take advantage of you?" I said, "They would no more think of doing that than of flying."

Their father rang me up about three days after we'd started and said, "What have you done to my boys?" I said, "What do you mean, what have I done?" "Well," he said, "They're upstairs doing homework, and they've never done one stroke of homework in their lives." I said, "They're very ambitious." He said, "Oh, they're not." "Well, they are," I said. And they were, very. It was just a joy to teach them. [Neil and Bart Voor-sanger]

Riess: You would think that it would be a condition of being a good teacher to have rapport and openness to children, but I think that there must be a lot of terror of the unknown-ness of a child's thinking.



Arnstein: Oh, there is. A lot of teachers are afraid of children. That's why they put the lid on them.

Riess: I had the feeling, reading Dear Harriet, that the school over the years began to be a haven for more and more disturbed children.

Arnstein: I don't think it was that. We did have some disturbed children because it was natural for parents to take them out of the public school where they couldn't adjust. The hope was that in smaller groups they'd receive more attention.

My thesis in this book, if you can call it that, is that you cannot make a judgment about any given child at any one time. I've seen changes in children that are simply extraordinary, and you've read about them in here. I have complete faith in the ability of children to grow and change.

Riess: I have some questions, actually, on that book.

Arnstein: All right, go ahead.

Riess: [laughs] It's very hard to be systematic in these interviews, I want you to know.

Arnstein: Yes. I think you are wonderful! I told Willa that I thought you were a wonderful interviewer, and she said, "Well, she's much better than I would have been."

Riess: I did notice that you had bag lunch sessions with your children. Was that optional?

Arnstein: Yes, it was optional. Some of the children went to the cafeteria that was run by two of the mothers.

Riess: When and where did you do your verbatim note taking?

Arnstein: I took notes all the time. The children were used to that because they, themselves, took notes in the assembly. They never paid any attention to my taking notes.

Riess: Were you singular in that in the school?

Arnstein: No. Miss Turner, my principal, did that. I think I learned that through her. In fact, the only teaching I ever learned was through her.

Riess: The note taking began to be a way of thinking about what was happening?

Arnstein: I always at nighttime went over what had happened during the day, trying to evaluate what had been favorable and what hadn't been. I was none too sure of myself at the start.

I remember one time I had a little boy in my class who was characterized by his parents as stubborn. [Dear Harriet, pp. 82-85] Well, his parents were stubborn. (My sister-in-law once defined stubbornness to me in a wonderful way. She said, "You're stubborn if you don't do what somebody else wants you to do." I think that's perfectly legitimate, to do what you want to do, and not what they want! [laughs]) Anyway, he was an antagonistic little boy. He was the one who wrote the poem about he wished he was a girl. You see, his parents indulged their little girl and were very strict with him.

I was teaching dancing and my back was turned because I was at the piano. The boy would kick or pinch a child, who would let out a wail. I'd look around, and tell him to sit down. He said, "I'm not going to." I was a bit stumped, "What am I going to do with this child? He won't sit down if I tell him to." All the children were looking expectant, because they knew I was on the spot. At that moment, to my horror, the door opened and the principal brought in two visitors. I thought, "My God, what am I going to do with this boy standing up there defying me?" Suddenly, I had an inspiration. I played the sitting down chord for the whole group, so, of course, he sat down with the rest. [laughs]

After school class I had a group of kids that wanted to go on reading poetry. They made a little class of themselves, and he was one of them. By that time he was pessimistic about life and about the world. I felt so sad about him. He was confirmed in his feeling of antagonism.

Riess: When you reviewed your day, and you reviewed your notes, did you do that with anyone?

Arnstein: No, by myself.

Riess: If you really got into a thorny problem, would you take it to Miss Turner?

Arnstein: Yes. In fact, there was one little boy in the class that had a wooden hand. Whether he'd been born without a hand, or it had been amputated, I don't know. But I was having a dancing class, and the first time they were coming up I wondered if there would be any trouble about another child taking this wooden hand.



Arnstein: I went to ask Miss Turner's advice because I was really troubled about what to do. She had a visitor at the time so she couldn't see me. I was left on my own. When the group came in, I said, "Make a circle," with my heart in my mouth, and "Frankie" (whom I've told you about) took this wooden hand and said, "Don't bopp me on the head with that." Perfectly simple.

Riess: That's nice. Children can be very good.

Arnstein: They can and they can't.

Riess: I was interested in that questionnaire that you gave your children. [Dear Harriet, pp. 88-94] You opened up a lot of difficult issues in that. You didn't worry about what might result from this?

Arnstein: No, because there were options: they didn't need to write anything. Some of them didn't, some of them may have written what they thought I would like to hear, I don't know. I don't have much faith in questionnaires anyway, but I thought if it threw any light on the children and their problems, it would be valuable for me.

Riess: It seems to me there would be a risk of opening "cans of worms."

Arnstein: There's a risk in everything you do.

Riess: I know, but when you're dealing with children with parents who are as concerned as that parent population, the parents could all have been upon you in a minute.

Arnstein: Children don't take home much from school, unless they've been very badly injured.

Riess: That's interesting.

Arnstein: Children are very reticent toward their parents, I find.

Riess: Why do you think that is?

Arnstein: This is due to the fear that they will be talked about. "Frankie" said to me, "I don't say anything in my house because my mother talked about me at the last meeting."

Riess: Did any of the children stay after and keep trying to get more and more from you, just because they established a very strong relationship.

Arnstein: No, they didn't stay after school. The only time they stayed after school was when we were printing a little yearbook of poems. I don't know if I showed you any. Have you seen those little books?

Riess: From the school? No.

Arnstein: They printed these little books by themselves. We had fallen heir to a multigraph from the upper group, and I told you about the boy who knew how to work it. Since each child had to be taught how to set type, it looked as if we were not going to be able to finish the book before the term end. But it had been such a good project, and so much had gone into it, that I felt it was a great shame if it wasn't finished. I called on Miss Turner, and she came into the group and said, "How would it be if I excused each one of you a half hour of work during the day, and you gave that time to the printing?" That was done, and sometimes the child would even stay after school to print.

This is a funny one: They dedicated this book to me, and one day the boy that was to do the dedication had to go to the dentist, so he couldn't stay after school. He said to me, "Would you mind setting this up?" So I set up this tribute to myself. [laughs]

Riess: Did you have favorites in each class?

Arnstein: No, I didn't have favorites, but there were some children that had a special appeal. I told in the book about the little boy who had been adopted, who had such a special appeal.

Riess: What was his name?

Arnstein: He came in saying his name was Billy, but he didn't like to be called that. I said, "Have you a middle name?" I think he said, "Bruce." "Well, how would you like to be called "Bruce" in this class?" He was a very disturbed child, and just changing his name and being in a new class wasn't enough to help him. He got better as we went along. I felt he needed acceptance, which all children need, but he needed special acceptance because he was discriminated against by his father who was a second husband to the mother. He was his mother's child, and the mother was a little too moralistic about him. His sisters picked on all of his vulnerable points. I felt he was a sad little boy. He took too much responsibility for the family finances.

Riess: Certain things stood out to me in the book. For instance, the way the class handled "Edna" I thought was just enormously interesting. [Dear Harriet, pp. 44-51]

Arnstein: It was. That was a time when I allowed the children to talk freely so that they rid themselves of emotionalism. When at the next meeting they came to discuss "Edna," all the heat had been expended. The girl whom I talked about in the chapter on the I.Q. was the one that handled it, with "Edna."

It's a very funny thing, "Edna" was a niece of mine, was my sister's youngest daughter, Edith, and I never was able to motivate her. I always thought that she had more intelligence and ability than she manifested in her work. I thought maybe that was something in my relation to my sister that wasn't right. I never could figure it out. When Miss Turner was teaching at San Francisco City College Edith was in her class, and she said she could never get her to do good work. She said, "I know she's more intelligent than the work she puts out." I talked to Edith's sister about that in recent years. She said, "She really wasn't interested in the intellectual aspect of things, she was interested in people."

She has, as an adult, done a most extraordinary piece of work. She lives in La Mesa, which is near San Diego, and she's been working with young people, has participated in all kinds of humanitarian work. That's her interest. She married a kindly man, not intellectual, because she's not interested in matters of the intellect.

Riess: Can you see how the school influenced her?

Arnstein: I don't think it did. Except it gave her the opportunity for creativity in the poetry, in the dance, in music. She was a spoiled child. She was asthmatic, and her mother was very apprehensive about her, and hovered over her too much. Edith expected the same concern from the school, and, of course, the school couldn't give her that.

Riess: The fact you were taking notes on the children, and there was the potential of your publishing, would that have been a problem do you think?

Arnstein: I had changed the names.

Riess: That was enough?

Arnstein: Yes. I sent some of the chapters to Dr. Robert Coles. [1970] He offered to write me a preface if I ever got a publisher.

Riess: That would have been interesting. Did you do referrals to psychologists from the school?

Arnstein: No, there weren't any psychologists hereabouts.

Riess: Before Erikson there were no child psychologists?

Arnstein: No, not any that I knew of.

Riess: These days I think that teachers don't try to deal with a child's troubles, they say to the parents, "I think your child needs to see a psychiatrist."

Arnstein: Yes.

Riess: Weren't you overwhelmed at times? It seems to me you just had some tremendously difficult students.

Arnstein: I've said so. Sometimes you sit in front of the group, and think, "My God, I'm responsible for them, and what can I do?" Oh yes, I had moments of self-doubt all along.

Riess: How did you integrate your thinking and your observations with the other teachers?

Arnstein: I didn't. There was only one teacher I felt congenial with, and she was the art teacher. She had the same approach to children as I had. She eventually went to a school down in San Mateo. She invited me to visit it and it was a most interesting school.

The principal of the school also taught the eighth grade, and he was absent the day I went there, but the eighth graders were working by themselves, perfectly responsibly.

The art teacher said her job was to work with the whole school one day, and she could take them out into the country, or do anything she wanted with them.

When the principal returned, he did a most strange thing. He had the children walking up and down between the desks, and he would have them singing. He would give them mental arithmetic problems to solve while they were singing. [laughing] It was the oddest performance.

I asked the principal, "How do your children adapt when they go to public high school." He said, "Marvelously. They never have any trouble with adaptation at all." He was really a gifted person.

Riess: Were you assigned to a grade, a classroom, at Presidio Open Air?



Arnstein: Originally I taught dance and poetry. Then Miss Turner asked whether I would like to take a grade. I said, "I would much prefer that." She said, "Why?" I said, "Because I'm interested in the development of children. If I have them just once or twice a week I can't follow that too well, but if I have them everyday, then I know where they are." She gave me first, I think, the fourth grade. Ultimately, I taught every grade in the school, from the second grade up, wherever she placed me.

Riess: Do you think she was placing you in situations where the classroom population would particularly need someone like you?

Arnstein: I can't answer that; I don't know what her motives were. Her faith in me was a great support. Her entire interest was in the welfare of the children, and by what means that was arrived at she wasn't too concerned with. She knew my attitude toward children, my respect for them, and she had faith in putting me in any group.

I always started with a new group by saying, "I try to be fair, but sometimes a teacher doesn't know everything that goes into a situation. I want you to feel free to tell me anytime you think I'm not fair." I had that in the book, about the I.Q. of the girl who put her hand up and said I wasn't fair. When they knew that I didn't feel I was infallible it gave them also the security to feel it wasn't awful if they weren't infallible.

Riess: Did you have a very structured day?

Arnstein: I planned my day very carefully, yes.

Riess: Tell me a little bit about the lesson planning. Did you do it each day, or for the week?

Arnstein: Yes, each day. No, not for the week because you never could tell how the children would react. You had to be very flexible; maybe you had to discard what you had planned, and do something else if the children didn't respond.

Riess: Would there sometimes be a mood in the classroom so that you couldn't even proceed?

Arnstein: No, I don't think so. I think the classroom, by and large--now I don't say always, but by and large, is affected by the teacher's attitude toward the children. If you are not critical of them, they're not critical of each other because they don't gain anything by it. They don't gain status by it. If you are likely to draw attention to favorable aspects of a work, they're likely to do the same. I think children adopt the tone of the teacher.



- Riess: How about the teaching of math? Did you have any particularly clever ways of handling that?
- Arnstein: No, I was a strictly textbook mathematician. I can't do mathematics today except by textbook. I have a story about Art Hoppe in there, how he showed me a shortcut and I couldn't do it.
- Riess: [laughs] What were the other parts of the curriculum? Did you have foreign languages?
- Arnstein: Oh yes.
- Riess: Did you teach them?
- Arnstein: No, I couldn't. We had a French teacher I think, once. I don't remember that very well.
- Riess: And you taught history?
- Arnstein: No, that was part of our social studies program.
- Riess: After you'd taken care of math and social sciences--.
- Arnstein: There was spelling, and arithmetic, and reading. They all had to be taken care of.
- Riess: You differentiated poetry from reading?
- Arnstein: Oh, yes. I never wanted poetry to be anything but related to poetry. I never wanted it to be where spelling or writing was corrected. Nothing else mattered but the poetry.
- Riess: Was the poetry part of the daily curriculum?
- Arnstein: No, never daily. Maybe two or three times a week when I was teaching in the group, but it was about twice a week when I was teaching just poetry, because I was teaching the whole school.
- Riess: In your mind who was "Harriet"?
- Arnstein: I haven't the faintest idea. It was just a name I pulled out of the air. I had a friend called Harriet, but she wasn't a teacher. She was an entirely different kind of a person.
- Riess: But you have an idea of a kind of a person you called Harriet?
- Arnstein: Oh yes, she was sympathetic to my outlook. [laughs]

Riess: A wise friend.

Why did you stop teaching?

Arnstein: I stopped teaching because I had been instrumental in getting a man from the east from the Columbia experimental school, Lincoln School, where Dewey had made his experiments. I thought anybody that came from there would be fine. I found out later Columbia kicked him upstairs, they were so glad to be rid of him. He was utterly irresponsible. He had twin boys that were the most disturbed children. They held the gate to school closed one day, and nobody could get in. He never knew how to handle his own children, or how to handle any children.

I went past the kindergarten one day and I saw a little child sitting on a chair on top of a table. I reported this to him, saying it was too dangerous. He never did anything about it. One boy started to burn a sweater out the window. The house was wooden and was inflammable, and the kindergarten children were sleeping downstairs. I reported that to him, and said, "I think every noon hour should be monitored by one of the teachers. They should look in the bathrooms, and other parts of the school, to see that every child is accounted for." He never did anything about that.

Oh, and then it's mandatory by law that there should be somebody when children are on the playground, but he never had anybody there. He was talking to the teachers in the cafeteria. By that time I just felt I couldn't be associated with it; it was a situation I couldn't sanction, so I quit.

Riess: Was that a kind of watershed for the school? Did a lot of teachers fall away at that point?

Arnstein: No, none of them. I was very stringently criticized by a number of the mothers for leaving. The principal was a good advertiser, and the mother's felt that was good for the school. But he wasn't any good as principal--or teacher.

Riess: Did you see much of the fathers, or is it always mothers who come to school on their children's behalf?

Arnstein: I saw one of the fathers, who was Dr. Wolff, the one who was Carla's father. He examined the babies' throats in the morning. No, I didn't see much of the fathers.

Riess: We were talking earlier about mothers and daughters. Do you think that the mother-son relationship is as dynamic?

Arnstein: I wouldn't be prepared to say. I don't know.

Riess: Back to the questionnaire in Dear Harriet, it was to me almost like it was addressing some of the questions that you might have been formulating about your own childhood.

Arnstein: I see.

Riess: You were talking about fears, and to whom the children talked about their fears?

Arnstein: Yes, that's right. I think it is very hard for this generation, for you for instance, to recognize the extent repression played in our lives. Repression was on every level. That's very hard for people to understand today. You could go out with a boy for a walk, but you couldn't go to a show with him, or to a movie if there were any movies--nickelodeons in those days. You could go to a dance, but only with another couple, not alone with a boy.

I don't know if I told you this story of my husband: He went to bring a young girl to a dance at the Palace Hotel, and the girl's mother said, "Who are you going with?" He said, "Nobody." She said, "Oh, I can't let you take my daughter." He said, "Well, if you can't trust me with your daughter, I won't take her." "It isn't that I don't trust you," she said, "but I don't trust some of the other boys. If I trust you, I'd have the trust the others, too." You could go only two by two.

Riess: How involved were the mothers at the school in committees and in volunteering?

Arnstein: I don't know exactly. I only know about Mrs. Whitney, with whom I worked. I don't know how much the others were involved. I don't remember. I think they'd just place the children in the school.

Riess: It sounds as though Miss Turner would have preferred not to deal with the mothers.

Arnstein: Oh no, she dealt with them in meetings.

Riess: But you said that she was somewhat shy of that.

Arnstein: She was shy, but she had the meetings nevertheless. She dealt with the subjects that she thought were pertinent to the school. I don't know how much the mothers took in.

Riess: How expensive was the school?

Arnstein: I've forgotten. According to today, it was not expensive. It was always on the brink financially; it always needed help. As I said, we put our last savings into it.

Riess: Was the school population wealthy enough to bail it out?

Arnstein: We never were ahead of the game. Miss Turner was very frugal, and saved a lot by careful buying. She was much upset because my sister-in-law's husband took those savings and she wanted to put them back into the school. I felt with her that she was being unjustly treated.

Riess: He took them for what reason?

Arnstein: Because he had put so much financially into the school he thought he was entitled to the savings.

Riess: Some of the parents, like the Rosekranses, maybe could have afforded more.

Arnstein: I know, but I don't remember any others that wealthy. Oh well, the Haases were well-to-do. But the financial element I wasn't interested in.

Riess: When you came home at night with your pockets full of notes from the class, and your plans for the next day, did you share all of that with your husband?

Arnstein: No. I'd tell him the things that I thought he would be interested in, but I never did any sharing with him. He wasn't interested in the educational process.

Riess: Did you have a desk, an office, at home?

Arnstein: I must have had a desk somewhere to work on, but I didn't have an office that I remember.

Riess: When would you sit down and make your plans for the next day?

Arnstein: When I got home, in the evening. I went in the afternoon generally to see my mother, if she was alone. If she had company, I had the time to myself.

Hughes Mearns

[Interview 5: February 6, 1985]

Riess: How did your connection with Hughes Mearns develop?

Arnstein: I told you I had read his book.

There was a woman named Nellie Sargeant in New York who wrote to our school when our principal, Miss Turner, was leaving. She wrote, "I am compiling a book of poetry from children all over the United States, and I understand your children have been writing poetry. Would you be willing to send me some that I might include in my book?" Miss Turner handed the letter to me and said, "I'm leaving and this is up your alley. If you want to go ahead on it, do." I got in touch with Miss Sargeant, and we had quite a correspondence.

Once I was going to New York with my husband, and I wrote of this to her. She said, "By all means come to see me, I want to discuss some of the poems I have." When I met her she said, "Now, what can I do for you here in New York." I said, "You can tell me where I can find creative work going on." "There is none," she said. "There's no creative work going on in New York."

"The second thing I would like is to get an introduction to Hughes Mearns," I said. "Do you happen to know him?" "Oh," she said, "I know him very well." She wrote a letter to him and included some of my children's poems I had sent her. Hughes Mearns was teaching at New York University and I sat in on one of his classes, and after his class I talked with him. I told him of an article I'd written on the development of poetic criteria. He said, "My goodness, that's never been done. How did you do it?" I said, "I always wrote the date when the children wrote the poems, and then they would like to re-read their poems as the years went on. I could trace from their remarks, which I put down with dates, where they had grown in appreciation and understanding in criteria." He said, "You must publish that." I said, "Who on earth would publish it?" (There was then a progressive magazine, Progressive Education, and they did publish it.)

After we had had a long talk he said, "I want you to go home and write a book about your experiences with children writing poetry." I said, "Mr. Mearns, you've done the definitive one, why should I do it?" He said, "No, I've done it only for high school students and you've worked with elementary ones."



Arnstein: You must write it." On the way home I began to write it in the upper berth of the train [laughs], and I went on writing and then I sent it back to him as he had asked me to do. He wrote me letter upon letter about it, went over it with a fine tooth comb.

Riess: You sent him the complete manuscript?

Arnstein: I sent him the whole thing when I got through. He gave me a lot of suggestions, some of which I could take which were very helpful, some of which I couldn't. Here is the whole correspondence between me and Hughes Mearns. If you'd like to have that to look over, you can. [in The Bancroft Library]

Riess: In what ways did it change the book, do you think?

Arnstein: A couple of things I can tell you he told me that were very valuable: He told me to cut out the "I" wherever I could. Instead of "I did this," I should say, "It so happened that."

"On the other hand," he said, "you've done what you must never do. That is, you've underrated your action in the whole process. You've implied the children did it all by themselves. That never happens, and you must in some way, accept the fact that you were part of the picture." You can have this whole correspondence if you like.

Riess: Tell me about the man himself.

Arnstein: I don't remember very much about him, except that I was interested in his class. What he said to me was, "I need your book. I have nothing to refer to. There's nothing written on the subject except my own book. It's the hardest thing to get over to teachers, this business of allowing the children to go to themselves, instead of giving them topics to write on."

Riess: I don't think you've explained to me how you came across his book in the first place, how you knew about it?

Arnstein: I don't remember that, except that I was interested in poetry and interested in children. I must have come across it somehow.

Riess: When Miss Sargeant said there was no creative work going on, I thought the Bank Street School was a very progressive school.

Arnstein: Yes, but they were not doing any creative work in poetry, according to her. I tried to get in touch with her afterwards, through the New York University. She was in the city educational field. But I was never able to. I don't know whether she has died.

Riess: You had a hard time acknowledging that you had been responsible for the growth of the children?

Arnstein: I didn't want to pat myself on the back and give myself roses. I managed to do it in such a way that it was the environment that brought it about, and I was part of the environment.

### Learning to be a Teacher

Riess: How did you and Mr. Arnstein bring up your children, given the environment that you had grown up in? Maybe you're going to tell me that you didn't make any decisions, you had no thoughts about it, it just happened.

Arnstein: No, I didn't have any outlines.

Riess: You seem a very conscious person. I can't think that you would have drifted into being a parent.

Arnstein: I did the best I could with my children according to the repressive ideas of that age, but as I look back on it today, I see a lot of things I would have done differently.

Riess: Did you ask your mother's advice when you were having problems with the children.

Arnstein: No, on the contrary I disliked it when my mother interfered. She belonged to the repressive age, and didn't approve of the little that I did with my children that was not. [laughs]

Riess: Did you have a philosophy of child rearing?

Arnstein: I had no philosophy.

Riess: Did you refer to any of the books about children?

Arnstein: No, I don't think I did. I don't remember even reading any books about children. I may have, but I don't remember. My memory is spotty.

Riess: What would you say you really learned from Marion Turner?

Arnstein: Whatever teaching techniques I had at all I learned from her. One of them was to talk in a low voice, not to shout at the children. Another was to listen to the children, not just hear them, but listen to what they said and take it into consideration.

Arnstein: Originally, she had sat in on what I called "a sing" that I had with my own children. Once a week my children would bring in some friends and we'd have a sing around the piano. They'd make up songs and they'd make up little actions. She asked me to come to the school to teach music and said she was having trouble with music teachers. I said, "I've never taught, I can't possibly." She said, "Do what you do with your own children." "That's not teaching," I said.

Miss Turner said, "They've gotten to hate music." In an unguarded moment I said, "They wouldn't hate it if I taught them." She said, "I'm going to take you up on that." I refused, but my husband pushed me over the brink. So that's how I got into music at the school.

Riess: When you say that you learned everything from her, did you observe her teaching?

Arnstein: She wasn't teaching at that time, but she was later on. (That discouraged me very much because she did what I wasn't able to do.) She left each of us very free. I was always amazed at the freedom that she allowed her teachers, each with a--I don't like the word method, but each with a different approach. She said, "The most important thing is the relation of the teacher to the children. If that's all right, I'll let the rest go." Of course, as I said, she gave the children a test every year. We always filled out the tests successfully.

Riess: In a piece called "The Second Aborted Project" you describe your own education, and then you talk about Marion Turner. You say that her approach to education had a psychologic slant. [Vignettes, pp. 112-116]

Arnstein: Yes, the old psychology stressing the surroundings, which contended that in a favorable environment children would improve. I had read enough of Freud to realize this also, but much more important, I thought, it was what happened to the children in their early relation to their parents.

We had disputes on this matter, so much so that I said, "I don't think we really ought to work together because our approach is so different." Then she wrote me a very charming letter in which she said I was practicing exactly the things she cared about, and she wouldn't think of my leaving. So, that's how I stayed on.

Riess: The fact that you were able to quote Freud to her means that you really had been studying him?

Arnstein: I had been reading a little bit of Freud, yes.

Teaching Disturbed Boys, and Children of  
Other Backgrounds

- Riess: In this "Second Aborted Project" you had arranged with Dr. [Jacob S.] Kasanin to teach.
- Arnstein: Oh yes, to teach the group of disturbed boys.
- Riess: I was interested that you were concerned with disturbed children. I asked you last week why there seemed to be so many disturbed children in the school.
- Arnstein: Naturally a small school would attract those parents whose children were not making good in the public schools. We had some disturbed children, but we had also some very gifted children, and also some retarded children. We had a wide spectrum because we always had scholarships, so that we never were an "elitist" school.
- Riess: Your scholarships sometimes went to disturbed or retarded children? Scholarships usually go to needy children.
- Arnstein: I really don't know. Miss Turner made the decision as to who got scholarships.
- Riess: Did she make an effort to make it racially mixed?
- Arnstein: No, at that time there was no racial mixture in the city. There were no blacks, there were no chicanos, there were only the Chinese who lived in their ghetto. There was no integration at that time at all.
- Riess: A scholarship might go to a child who was a real underachiever?
- Arnstein: Yes.
- Riess: Your "Second Aborted Project" must have been frustrating to you.
- Arnstein: I felt that I had made a mistake in even attempting it. The first mistake was that these children had to be brought by their parents--the mothers had to bring them for their "treatments." Then, the surroundings were unfavorable, and I believe surroundings should be pleasing for children. Then, they were never allowed to display their work, everything had to be put away. I felt that once a week was absolutely useless, that to counteract whatever was happening in the rest of their lives they should have had either daily, or at least three times a week sessions. So I just stopped the whole thing.



Arnstein: Dr. Kasanin had asked me to keep notes, yet he never looked at my notes, nor discussed the students with me. I thought that it was just a useless project, and I gave it up.

Riess: Those children were from different places?

Arnstein: Yes, they were. They were the children that were treated by the young psychiatrists who were under the auspices of Dr. Kasanin. One of the psychiatrists, Ernestine, who was my daughter's closest friend, told me he was just giving me the run around. I think he was, too.

He had told me I could speak to the young psychiatrists, and then he gave me only ten minutes. What can you do in ten minutes? I thought the whole thing was a failure.

Riess: Did you try to take it up anywhere else?

Arnstein: No, but I'll tell you something, I was twenty-five years ahead of my time. They were practising what I had tried to do, giving these disturbed children playwork, down at the Mt. Zion Hospital not too long ago, before they stopped the psychiatric work there. Now it's quite common.

Riess: You really risked rejection from the big doctor, didn't you?

Arnstein: I wasn't thinking of myself, I was thinking of the kids.

Riess: This was a very strong letter that you wrote about yourself, in which you state how well prepared you are [letter follows].

Arnstein: Yes, he asked me to give my credentials. Of course, I never had any.

Riess: Did your husband help you write that letter?

Arnstein: No.

Riess: Okay. You talk about the "Second Aborted Project." What was the "First"?

Arnstein: That may have been the Chinatown one. After I left the school it occurred to me it might be interesting to work with small groups from other backgrounds, and then I thought of Chinatown. I went down to the Chinese playground. I thought the first thing to do was to watch the children. There was a playground director who was a young Chinese woman who had graduated from Stanford University in "Playground Supervision."



March 21, 1943

Dear Dr. Kasanin:

You asked me to write you something about myself. As I told you, I have had a rather unorthodox background, inasmuch as I have no college degrees, and my education and training have come about in the course of the pursuit of my interests.

I started out to specialize in music, and therefore left school in order to devote more time to that study. However I did pursue my studies outside of school under the tutelage of Dr. Jessica Peixotto, of the University of California. Then I studied piano and harmony under Oscar Weil of this city, and later under Rubin Goldmark and Raphael Joseffy of New York. Previous to this, I had passed my preliminary examinations for the University of California. Some time after my marriage and the birth of my two children, I became interested in educational psychology, and took a course under Mme. Montessori, and then later entered as a special student at the University of California, where I pursued some courses under Dr. Bridgman and Dr. McFarlane. In connection with these courses I did six months of mental testing for the Juvenile Court. I became interested in psychoanalysis and have at different times received psychiatric help in relation to my own children.

As you know, my sister-in-law and I founded the Presidio Open Air School in order to assure our children an education along progressive lines. Upon Miss Turner's becoming principal of the school, I began my teaching. Miss Turner had had her B.S. from Columbia University, and her Master's from U.C. and had likewise done graduate work at Columbia. She had had psychiatric training as well, so that her approach to education had a psychologic slant, while she had herself evolved a creative technique for the democratic education of the children. Under her supervised guidance for many years, I received more than the equivalent of the prescribed years of conventional teacher training, and in addition had opportunities, encouraged by her, for experimental work in certain areas, notably creative work in poetry with the children. In addition to poetry, I have taught, at various times, music, folk-dancing, and the "grades" from the second through the eighth. In all, I have had seventeen years' teaching experience.

I have written an article on the development of Poetic Criteria in children, which was published in Progressive Education Magazine for January 1938. As a result of this article, I was asked by the Row, Peterson Publishing Company, publishers of text books, to write them a Monograph to be published under the direction of their research department for their teachers' series, and this was printed in 1939. At present I am engaged in writing, more for my own pleasure than with the thought of publication, some of my experiences in connection with the children at the school. They are written in an informal, discursive, narrative tone, and though they are literal fact, and substantiated by many notes taken at the time of the occurrences, they are in no sense "case studies." However, at your request, I am enclosing a few of them, as they will show you better than I can, by explanation, my approach to children and my faith in what can be accomplished under favorable controlled social settings.

My work in the field of creative poetry has been recognized by Mr. Hughes Mearns of the University of the City of New York, at whose suggestion I wrote the article for the Progressive Education Magazine, as he said there had been no material ever gathered on this type of development in children. In his latest book, THE CREATIVE ADULT, he devotes three or four pages to my work. The value of writing as a creative outlet for children I need not go into, but perhaps it may have some bearing on the matter to have you know that I myself have written poetry that has been published in such magazines as POETRY, founded by Harriet Monroe, THE LITERARY DIGEST, THE LONDON MERCURY, as well as in many poetry magazines and some anthologies.

I trust the above information will meet your requirements.

Sincerely yours,

Flora J. Arnstein

Arnstein: I asked her to give me some idea of the background of the children. She told me very interesting stories. Would you be interested in those?

Riess: Yes.

Arnstein: The children were being taught at a Catholic school, St. Mary's, that was on Stockton Street, I think. They went to that school in the morning, and they went to Chinese school at five o'clock, and then they came to me. The aborted experiment, I thought afterwards, was due to the fact that I thought it was terrible to keep these children sitting another hour. In the meantime, I found them the most repressed and nervous children that I had ever met. If a door slammed anywhere in the building, every child jumped.

I talked to Gloria Unti, a teacher of dance. She gave a marvelous demonstration of children who had been incarcerated, or who had committed some small crime. She had all these children doing the most marvelous creative acts, but there were three Chinese children that weren't doing anything. I said to her, "I'm interested in this. Why aren't those Chinese children doing anything creative?" She said, "I can't get them to do anything creative. They're absolutely closed off." I said, "I have found the same to be true in my group." The children would write, "This is the month we pray for the souls in purgatory." That was all the overlay of the Catholicism on the Chinese culture. I just thought it was useless, and I gave that up.

Riess: How had you chosen that population?

Arnstein: I was going to work with them, and then with the Negro population.

Riess: What happened to the Negro project?

Arnstein: I never did that. This discouraged me, because again just once a week or twice a week sessions are no good.

Riess: As a volunteer in these things you must have had to do an awful lot of explaining what you're all about.

Arnstein: People were sympathetic to it, but it didn't work out. [laughs]

Riess: Where else, what other schools out here were doing creative things besides Presidio Open Air?

Arnstein: Nowhere. There was no such thing then as poetry workshops. It was all experimental on my part.

Riess: Did you have any network at all?

Arnstein: No, I didn't know of anything going on. As a matter of fact, not much was going on.

Riess: We are talking about the forties, approximately?

Arnstein: I guess so.

Dance: Lenore Peters Job, Isadora Duncan

Riess: One of the things that I want to talk about this time is dance. I've been reading a little about Lenore Peters Job.

Arnstein: I found a letter of hers, which I was going to give you, but I spoke to my granddaughter Becky, who was originally in Lenore Peters' group, and she said, "Oh, give that to Judy [Job] because she would love to have it." It was a letter from her mother in which she commended my work in poetry.

Riess: How did the two of you meet?

Arnstein: It was through my daughter who had both her children, Margy [Margaret Jenkins], who is a present dancer, you know, and Becky, enrolled in her classes. Becky said to me the other day, "I was the star in that class, not Margy. I was really kind of hurt at the memorial service [for Lenore Peters Job] because they had Margy performing instead of me." She said, "Margy was not the star at that time at all."

I had sent both Margy and Becky to Utah, to that marvelous teacher there, I forget her name now [Virginia Tanner], because I had seen her work down at an Asilomar conference. I thought the girls were being awfully restricted by Lenore. Becky said, "Actually, we were restricted because she didn't progress with the times. She was wonderful at the beginning, but then she got stuck." She told me that in Utah Miss Tanner didn't do so well with adults as she did with children. So I don't think they got much there.

Riess: You sent them?

Arnstein: I sent them; I paid for them.



Riess: What was going on in dance in those early days?

Arnstein: They had a final performance every year.

Riess: The Peters-Wright School did?

Arnstein: Yes. I was indignant because they made you make the costumes for your children. [laughs] I thought that they ought to make the costumes, and not ask the mothers. I had to make costumes for Becky and for Margy.

Riess: But what about Edith?

Arnstein: Edith was the mother, and she didn't know how to sew. She brings me stuff to mend today. [laughs]

Riess: Did Lenore Peters Job have adult classes?

Arnstein: I don't know really. I think so, but I don't know.

Riess: Do you remember a woman named Ann Mundstock?

Arnstein: Sure, she created the Mensendieck method. My sister-in-law, the youngest one of my husband's sisters, Mabel, took up the Mensendieck method, studied it in New York, and practiced it here in San Francisco for many years.

Riess: Practiced it as a teacher of it?

Arnstein: Yes, a paid person. People would come to her for the Mensendieck exercises.

Riess: People who were having trouble with--.

Arnstein: Their back maybe, or their posture. I know my husband always stood very badly, and she got him to hold his tummy in, but when she stopped working with him he let his tummy out again. [laughs]

Riess: Was that considered to be a sort of "far out" thing to be doing?

Arnstein: Yes, it was. It wasn't very well-known.

Riess: That's what Ann Mundstock is mainly known for?

Arnstein: Yes.

Riess: Lenore Peters Job was involved with the Frederick Burke School. What was the Burke school like?



Arnstein: It was a much freer school. It was more along the Dewey lines than any other public school. Afterwards it was associated with the San Francisco State University. I'm trying to think who I knew that went there, but I can't remember now.

Riess: You said once that you studied dance with Isadora Duncan.

Arnstein: Yes, when I was a little child.

Riess: That was before she had gone on tour?

Arnstein: Sure, she wasn't known at all. She had a dance class on Sutter and Van Ness Avenue. She was then, already, oddly dressed for a teacher, according to my idea. No shoes, bare feet, and Grecian garb with a cord under her bosom. She would recite a poem to music, and she would show you Delsarte movements that you were to make with this poem. "I shot an arrow into the air." [gesturing] It was no creative thing on your part; she was doing it, and you were just expected to follow her.

One day, she had told the mothers they should make aprons and caps for the little girls. I kept wondering what this was for. When we arrived at the class on Saturday the little boys were given three legged stools. Isadora recited, "Where are you going my pretty maid? I'm going a milking, Sir." All to her motions, you see.

This lasted for a year or so, I don't know how long, and then I went to what I called a "real" dancing school. It had rubber steps on the stairs, and mirrors on the wall, and there I was taught the "Sailor's Hornpipe," and the "Cachucha," and "real" dancing.

Riess: Was Isadora all the rage with the mothers?

Arnstein: No, she was no rage, she wasn't known at all.

Riess: I wonder how your mother decided to let you go to her.

Arnstein: I don't know how she happened to do that, I really don't. I enjoyed it all because I enjoyed any kind of dancing. I might have been a dancer if I hadn't--[laughs]--like my granddaughter, Margy. She comes by those things naturally.

Riess: Did you ever say, when you were young, that you'd like to be a dancer?

Arnstein: No, I don't think I ever formulated it actually, but I enjoyed it no end.

## SEARCHING

Gertrude Stein, Harriet Levy

Riess: You knew the various members of the Stein family, all of whom put in their time in Paris, in the "right years"?

Arnstein: Well, I traveled east with Mike [Michael] Stein and his wife on one of my eastern trips [1906], because in those days a girl didn't travel alone; she had to be accompanied by--what shall I call it?--a chaperone.

Riess: And you told me you attended a reading by Gertrude Stein.

Arnstein: Oh yes, she came to San Francisco. My sister-in-law and I went to her lecture, called "The Daily Island Life." After she had mentioned "daily island life" about fifteen times I said to my sister-in-law, "I've had it, haven't you?" She said, "Yes," and we got up to go. Everybody looked at us disapprovingly. "How could we leave Gertrude Stein?" The most flattering reviews appeared in the papers next day. I always thought she was a fake, except she must have had a very enticing personality, because people responded to her so wonderfully, Hemingway and all these writers who are now dead. I think she invented the term, "the lost generation."

Riess: Alice Toklas was a San Franciscan, too.

Arnstein: That's right, and she was a friend of a friend of mine, Harriet Levy.

Riess: I'd like to hear about Harriet Levy.

Arnstein: She was a perfectly charming person, rather ungainly, and not good looking, but she had the great gift of drawing people out. I used to tell her I left her feeling like a soubrette. [laughs]

The way I met her was very strange: I had been writing little poems that came to me spontaneously, and I suddenly heard from somebody, I think through Mabel, that she had been writing poems, too. She was an aunt of Mabel's husband, Jeff Salinger. I rang her up and I said, "I hear you've been writing poetry." She said, "Yes, I have been writing some verse." I said, "I'd love to come and see you, and see some of your verse." She said, "Come along over," and so I went, and that started our friendship of many years.

She had the curious belief that everything she did was of extraordinary value. She had a marvelous ego. [laughs] She did paintings which people told me were awful. But everything she did she invested with this idea of glorification. She still was an utterly charming human being, and I enjoyed every visit with her.

Riess: A big ego is refreshing.

Arnstein: It's certainly refreshing when it draws other people out. She was really intensely interested in people, it wasn't a pretense at all.

Riess: Was she married?

Arnstein: No. She lived in Carmel for many years. I used always to visit her when I went down there for the Bach Festival.

Riess: How much older than you was she?

Arnstein: Much older. She was of another generation.

Riess: Had she written her book before you wrote yours?

Arnstein: I think she must have. She couldn't have it published until she was ninety years old, and then for several months it was a best seller. I've lost my copy, I must have lent my copy to somebody and never got it back. Something [920] O'Farrell Street.

In Search of Poetic Criteria; Grace Hazard Conkling

Arnstein: Just recently I wrote a poem that I think marks a certain maturity. I shall write only for myself hereafter. I was always too much influenced by people whom I admired. For instance, to Shirley Kaufman, when she criticized something in a poem, I would say, "Yes, I guess you're right." Then I'd go home and think, "Well, I wonder if I do think she's right?" My daughter criticizes my poems often because I make use of abstractions, and she doesn't like that. I'd think, "She's right," too, and then later I'd wonder. "What the heck, it's all right for me." So I've come to the place where I'm writing for myself now, I'm not writing for other people.

Riess: Often people say of themselves that they are their own worst critics.

Arnstein: They are, but I never was because I didn't have any criteria. When I first started to write I would send my things out to people. I would have letters back saying, "You write very nicely," or "You write very well"--never anything that gave me any suggestions. I knew I had no criteria, I knew there must be wrong things.

Well, when my eldest daughter was going to Europe with her art teacher and her husband, people by the name of Schevill, she left San Francisco ahead of them and stopped on the way at my cousin Fred Jacobi's, who was then teaching at Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts. Grace Hazard Conkling was also teaching there, and I thought maybe she could give me some criticism. I wrote her saying, "Do you give private criticisms, for pay of course, to people who feel the need of them?" She wrote back, "Yes, I'd be very glad to give you criticisms."

She gave me two sessions in which she criticized my things very severely. Then she said, "I'm doing absolutely the wrong thing." I asked "Why?" She said, "This criticism that I'm giving you should extend over two years, maybe longer, when you are ready for it, but I've dumped all this on you now, and that's the worst thing to do to a writer." True! I couldn't write a single thing for a year. But after that I began to be able to sort out what she had told me; I was able to accept the criticism and it was very helpful, and was the beginning of my finding a criteria of my own.

That's how I work with children. I allow them to build their criteria. I never give them a poem and say, "It's good," or never say of their poems, "It's good," or "It's bad." I

Arnstein: allow them to find out for themselves. I'll say, for instance, "How nicely that poet has noticed the colors of the trees." Then they think, "It's a nice thing to notice." They get these ideas obliquely, and that's been my principle in teaching, all the time.

Riess: Had you sent Grace Hazard Conkling your poems?

Arnstein: No. I took my poems to her.

I was in Northampton to see my daughter. I didn't tell you; she was taken ill with the flu, and then pneumonia, and the Jacobis phoned us to come on. The visit was when my daughter was convalescing.

Riess: The twelve poems you wrote that night, did you keep them?

Arnstein: Yes. Though interestingly, I didn't know what they meant. They came, as I say, from the unconscious.

Just the other day I reread one--now this is an interesting story, if you have time? It was called "A Walk." [following page] I had a very good friend at the Presidio Open Air School, whose two sons I had taught. I have mentioned her. Her name was Elizabeth Whitney. We were taking a walk once and I suddenly felt she wasn't with me. I said to her, "Elizabeth, a strange thing has just happened. I don't feel you're with me. Where are you?" She said, "I just can't get over your being Jewish." "After all these years of our friendship?" She said, "Yes, my father was anti-Semitic."

I was struck dumb! I just couldn't believe it! I reacted much too forcibly. She went to see her brother, who was a lawyer living in Los Gatos. His wife was a poet. She told him about this situation with us, and he said, "Well, do you know any Jewish people?" She said, "No, I don't." He said, "Maybe you ought to get to know some."

She told me of that, and I was much offended that she had talked to her brother. I thought the problem was something just between us. I said to her, "You know, Elizabeth, if you were willing to work this out with me, your prejudice and my overreaction, I'd be willing to work this out with you." I had invited her and her husband, who was my doctor, along with some of my Jewish friends, for a dinner the following week.

I said, "Elizabeth, I'm going to disinvite you to the dinner and I'll tell you why. I don't want you practicing on my friends, I don't want to submit them to your scrutiny."



Arnstein: She said, "I understand you perfectly." I said, "Are you willing to try to work this out with me?" And she said, "Yes." But we never could, we were both too self-conscious.

Annette Rosenshine

Arnstein: She and I had worked with a so-called analyst, Annette Rosenshine. This woman had been an acquaintance of mine in San Francisco, and she'd gone east with Harriet Levy to the first psychoanalyst that came to the United States, a man named Dr. [A.A.] Brill, straight from Freud. She worked with him for a while, and he told her--she had no training in psychoanalysis--she could come home and work with children.

At that time my oldest girl was entering adolescence and was beginning to be an "adolescent antagonist." I had seen a lot of these kids, and I didn't want her to get into a state where she was hating her mother, as all her friends were. Edith, our second daughter, was terribly over-conscientious, as she is still. I thought it would be a good idea for Miss Rosenshine to work with my children. They thought she was ridiculous. They said she was a joke right from the start. They came home and made fun of her, and pretended to be her.

Miss Rosenshine said to me one day, "I don't get anywhere with your youngsters. Unless you'll work with me, I can't accomplish anything." There was nothing I would not have done to help my kids, so I said, "All right." She started in and was just terrible with me. I'd bring her my dreams, and she interpreted them as follows: I was very bad at music, I had a wrong attitude towards it. I was bad for my children because I was too much of a power person, I would try to influence them unduly. She took the ground from under my feet! I wouldn't talk to her about my husband. I thought, "She's not going to take my husband from me, she's taken everything else."

You know what transference is? Miss Rosenshine had a big clientele in San Francisco, of which my doctor and his wife were members. She got all balled up in the transferences with all these people, and finally, she just broke down under it. Then she did the inexcusable thing, she asked if she could come to stay in my house, because she thought it would help her if she could be in a home with a normal family, a husband, a wife, and children. She stayed for two weeks in my home and she nearly drove me insane. She shouldn't have come, of course. And, she went off without having resolved the transference with anybody!

Riess: She sounds utterly unqualified.

Arnstein: She was utterly unqualified! At that point she wanted to go to Jung. I had said, "How are you going to manage with Jung? You don't speak German and he doesn't speak English." "Oh," she said, "we'll manage." He managed by sending her to somebody who did speak English. After Zurich, she came back to New York.

In the meantime, I had what was almost equivalent of a breakdown. We had exchanged houses with an aunt of mine in San Mateo who had a beautiful estate and wanted to come to live in the city for the winter. My husband had always wanted to live in the country, and I thought, "Well, this is a good chance to try out the country," so we exchanged places. At her place was a cook, a gardener, and so I had nothing to do except drive my husband to the train in the morning to come up to town, drive the children to the train--they went to school in Palo Alto--drive them back when they came home, that's all I did.

I didn't like to associate with the people in San Mateo because they were the card-playing, gossipy kind. Pretty soon I was just beside myself. One day I fell down and couldn't get up off the floor. My husband had to lift me up. I sent for my doctor [James Whitney]. He said, "What you need is an analysis." I said, "Oh, my God, never!" He said, "Well, you never had an analysis. That was no analysis, what you had. I worked with Miss Rosenshine too, but she was no analyst. Anyway," he said, "I'd like to get you out of here."

I said, "No." I was full of fears, one of which was hospitals. My mother came down to see me and began to fuss over me, and then the servants in the house wanted to know what to order, and the children would come, and finally I was so distracted that the next time the doctor came I said, "Take me out of here. I don't care where I go!" Strangely enough, I was able to get up and dress myself, though I had been so weak that I couldn't even bear to have a massage. I'd say, "I can't, it makes me too tired."

Well, I got up here and he put me in a private hospital and began to treat me. He was very good for me. He knew he knew nothing about analysis or psychology, but he accepted all my dreams (and I dreamed a whole book full of them), and they related very much to Miss Rosenshine

I wrote to Miss Rosenshine when I was in the hospital that I had gotten into a bad state, and she wrote back, "I regret nothing, everything I did was in the right direction."

Arnstein: I was infuriated by this. I showed her letter to Dr. Whitney. He said, "Forget about her. Wipe her out. She's just nothing in your life." I didn't see her again, she was in the east three years. When she came home, I could hardly look at her. I saw her occasionally, but we never got on any terms together.

Riess: She also was a sculptress, and a student of Matisse? \*

Arnstein: Yes, she did little figurines. They were horrors, most of them. My mother bought one when she was in Paris. It was called "Jazz." She sent it to me, I couldn't bear the sight of it. [laughs] I have one charming thing she did, a little portrait of a child, but the rest of the stuff was horrible.

Mrs. Whitney and I could never work out our problem. I think she must have identified me with her [the analyst] because she was Jewish, and I was Jewish, and she made a transference to me from her after she left. I dreamt about Mrs. Whitney for years. She had been a good friend, I liked her so much, and we had much in common. Then, one day I thought, "My gosh!" I dreamed she had kissed me. I thought, "It isn't a Jewish prejudice at all. She has interpreted it as that. What it is, is she's afraid of lesbianism."

That seemed to answer the question, because I stopped dreaming about her. But, just the other night I came across the poem, "The Walk."

Riess: I know the poem. Of all your poems it's the one that I wrote down because I was going to ask you about it.

Arnstein: Where did you get it?

Riess: In the little book called A Legacy of Hours [1927, Grabhorn Press, San Francisco].

Arnstein: Oh yes. You know what that poem really means?

Riess: What?

Arnstein: It means, "Though Jesus whom you worship/Was born a common Jew/  
As much of him there is in me/As there is in you./But though  
you--something--crucify/Yet, every Jew within him/Knows the  
crucifixion tree." Now, that's the answer! Every Jew has been

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\*The Western Jewish History Center of the Judah L. Magnes Museum, Berkeley, includes in its archives a document box on Flora Jacobson Arnstein, containing sixty items, including an article about A. Rosenshine.

*A*  
*LEGACY*  
*of*  
*HOURS*  
*by*  
*Flora J. Arnstein*



*San Francisco*  
1927

[ 59 ]

## A W A L K

*Jew to  
Christian*

**W**E cannot swing into a stride,  
 So long as we remain  
 You sunk in bondage,  
 I sunk in pain.

We, the Jew and Christian,  
 Puppets still of fate,  
 Age after age proclaiming  
 Our heritage of hate;

Though Christ, whose name you carry,  
 Was born a common Jew,  
 As much of him there is in me,  
 As there is in you.

And though he perished for you,  
 He perished in me,  
 So every Jew within him knows  
 The crucifixion tree.



Arnstein: subjected to crucifixion, which in a sense means prejudice. That's what the poem's about, and I never knew it until the other day.

I was telling this to my grandson. He's very keen, and he said, "Granny, you know the funny thing, there's a word you used in there. You wrote, "We cannot walk together/So long as we remain sunk in bondage--." And he said, "Do you know what bondage meant? The Jews were in bondage to Egypt, but you transferred that bondage to her." I never recognized that at all until he told me. I said, "I think you're perfectly right about that." She was in bondage to that prejudice.

The last line should have been different. "So let us walk together," that should not have been, it should have been, "We cannot walk together/So long as you remain." It should have been that, but I didn't know it at the time. It shouldn't be, "So let us walk together."

Riess: What it is, is, "We cannot swing into a stride/So long as we remain/You sunk in bondage--."

Arnstein: Oh, I said, "We cannot--," yes.

Riess: That was terrifically interesting, and now it's almost lunch time for you.

Arnstein: Well, what do you know! Are you getting enough out of this to make a real case history of it? You know, I was very reluctant to do an oral history on two counts. One of them is that I don't like to advertise myself. The second, which is much more important, is that formerly these [oral histories] were funded by foundations, but now they're funded by soliciting people, and I do not like to approach people to do this. I asked them please not to solicit my grandchildren, none of whom is in the position to give very much. Caroline Voorsanger, who is much interested in the oral history, accepted that, but my daughter said, "Mother, I think it will look very bad if all names appear listed in the book and none of your family's names are there. And as long as the amount of money isn't quoted, there's no reason why the names shouldn't appear." So I said to Caroline, "Well, you can send them the request, but also stress the fact that they don't have to make any donation unless they feel able to, or want to." A number of them have said to me, "We would feel awful if we couldn't be part of that!" So that's how it's worked out.

Riess: That's good.

Arnstein: I said to Dr. Settlage, "It flatters my ego that they wanted an oral history of me." He said, "What's wrong with flattering your ego? Go ahead and flatter it!" [laughs]

Further Search for Poetic Criteria; the Audience

Riess: This business of writing poetry. I was looking back into the interview I did with Helen. She was writing poetry.

Arnstein: Long before I was.

Riess: Long before you were?

Arnstein: Yes, and she discouraged my first attempts. She told me they were trite. I never wrote again for years.

Riess: Of course, her ego was fine also.

Arnstein: She had a real ego, and she had an ability to compartmentalize her thoughts. I remember she told me that my friend Marion Turner had said something shocking to her one night. She had consoled her on her daughter's death, the daughter who had died some months before. I said, "What's so terrible about that?" She said, "I'm compartmentalized. I wasn't thinking about that." She just closed things off, bit by bit.

Riess: You're saying that this is a good ability, or a bad?

Arnstein: I think it serves people where their egos are vulnerable, but I don't think it's good because it isn't honest.

Riess: Did you continue to discuss your poetry with Helen?

Arnstein: She was very generous at the outset, and very appreciative. I said to her once, "If it was the contrary and you were doing it, and I were you, I would be terribly envious." She said, "I'm not envious of you, but you have put a little crimp into me." [laughs]

Later on, she became competitive, so much so that if I'd bring her a poem, she'd look at it and look at it and I felt, "She's looking for one word she doesn't like." Then, if she found the one word, she'd ring me up the next day and say, "Have you changed it?" I would say, "Changed what?" "That word." I said, "No, I like it." It got so I never showed her things at the end because I thought she was just looking for something to criticize.

Riess: Isn't the writing of poetry a very personal and tender kind of act?

Arnstein: "Tender" isn't a word I'd associate with it.

Riess: I mean, the emotions are tender.

Arnstein: No, I don't think of the word "tender" at all in relation to it. It is a spontaneous outburst from the unconscious. It's spontaneous, you don't know what's coming. You hardly know what gives the impulse. You don't relate it to your mundane self. In fact it seems to me my whole writing has been one attempt in some way to relate this spontaneity to my everyday life. They don't seem to match.

Riess: Developing poetic criteria in adults, would it be the same as in children?

Arnstein: Yes. I don't think I developed any criteria until quite late in my writing, because people used to say to me, "This needs working over," and I never knew what they meant. [laughs] Now I'm throwing away quantities of poems, and quantities of stories I've written in the last few years. I thought they were sentimental, which is not my style at all, or they were trivial. I'm going over the poems and finding those which are repetitive or derivative, and destroying them.

Riess: It makes me wonder how you decide which creative impulse is worth taking out into the world, and which is just getting it out of your system?

Arnstein: You have to wait some time until you've arrived at another place in your own development.

Riess: When you started writing poetry it looks like you felt that you wanted it to be seen. Why? I'm asking you, as a poet, why does it have to be read by someone else?

Arnstein: You don't write only for yourself.

Riess: Lots of artists and creative people do things only for themselves. Don't you think?

Arnstein: I don't know, do they?

Riess: Do you write your poems for any particular audience?

- Arnstein: No, I write because they come to me. But if they have any validity at all, they should have a larger appeal. One of my friends in the discussion group said, "How do you happen to always write the things I'm feeling?" Unless you write something that has more or less a universal application, it's too personal, and I don't think it has a true value.
- Riess: That's interesting. The things you've been throwing away recently you would say had not.
- Arnstein: No, I think they don't have enough of an appeal.
- Riess: At the time that you were writing a lot of poetry, what poets were you reading?
- Arnstein: I've always read Robert Frost, I like him. Also Wallace Stevens. I don't know, there are so many of them. Archibald MacLeish. William Carlos Williams, though I don't like his work too much. I've read a little bit of Ezra Pound, which I also don't care for. I can't remember the names of others now.
- Riess: Did you subscribe to all the magazines?
- Arnstein: I subscribed to Poetry Magazine--edited by Harriet Monroe.
- Riess: Yes. And other poetry magazines?
- Arnstein: There were a lot of them that were just small town magazines. I gave you a list of magazines that published my poems.\*
- Riess: Did you know Sara Bard Field?
- Arnstein: Sure. She gave me a great deal of good criticism. I gave her letters to Jim Hart. I was very much surprised to find that I had some poems on which she had given me very good criticism I accepted it, and I changed many of those animal poems that I had in my book. She was a very charming woman, delightful.
- Riess: How did you meet her?
- Arnstein: Through Helen, she was a friend of Helen's.
- Riess: Did you have a poetry writing group then, really? No? How about some of these other San Francisco luminaries. Did you know Genevieve Taggard?
- Arnstein: I have given Jim Hart a lot of letters that I had from Genevieve Taggard about my poems.

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\*See Appendix H.

Riess: I'd be interested in your personal recollections.

Arnstein: I don't think I ever met Genevieve Taggard, I think it was only a correspondence. Whom did I meet? I don't think I met any of them.

Riess: When you sent your poems to people to consider I see that they were all in typescript. Did you type all these things?

Arnstein: Yes. I can't type today, but I did then.

Riess: Did you have a secretary?

Arnstein: No, I wasn't that fancy.

"Did You Know?"

Riess: Did you know George Sterling?

Arnstein: I didn't know him.

Riess: Did you know Robinson Jeffers?

Arnstein: No, I knew his home down in Carmel. Albert Bender sent him one of my books.

Riess: Was Albert Bender very helpful to you?

Arnstein: No, not helpful, but he was encouraging, always very appreciative.

Riess: Was he a friend of yours?

Arnstein: Well, he was a friend of my parents. He used to come to our home to dinner, and he always stayed very long. He would move to the edge of his chair and my father would begin to get up, and then he would settle back, and my father had to settle back also. [laughs]

Riess: Did Albert Bender help you with publishing anything?

Arnstein: No.

Riess: Did you know Benjamin Bufano and Ralph Stackpole?



Arnstein: No, I didn't know either of those. They were friends of Helen's. That was the art world. I was not connected with it in any sense.

Riess: Did the Grabhorns publish one of your books?

Arnstein: Yes, the first two little books.

Riess: Going down my little list over here, did you know Dorothea Lange?

Arnstein: No, I didn't know her personally, but I knew her [step-]daughter who was the mother of my eldest granddaughter. What's her name? Constance Dixon.

Riess: You knew Imogen Cunningham?

Arnstein: Yes, she came up here and took my husband's and my pictures for her book, Over Ninety.

Riess: Had she been a friend before?

Arnstein: No, I'd never known her before, and I found her very attractive, though Helen thought she was the most ugly person she'd ever seen. I didn't. She was very "spritely," like a little bird hopping around the room and taking our pictures. I had a feeling that she didn't like old people, she placed them in such awful lights. I think the picture of us in her book is simply horrible. It makes my husband look one hundred years old, which he wasn't, and it makes me look as if I were trying very hard to look young, which I wasn't. [laughs]

Down in Carmel there was a woman named Jeanne D'Orge Cherry. Did you ever hear of her? [Vignettes, pp. 78-88] She was an elderly woman who had established a foundation in Carmel. At one time she wanted to assemble people who had done creative work with children in different fields, some in dance, some in music, in art, and me in poetry. She had been introduced to my poetry book by two young men. She always had somebody to do her housework in exchange for giving them living space.

I have written about her. I don't know if you'd be interested in this. It's also about all the other people who were there. ["Children's Festival," and "Jeanne D'Orge Cherry," in Vignettes]

## WRITER AND STUDENT

Writer's Conference, Utah, 1948

Arnstein: Now, what is this? This is a letter from Salt Lake when I went to one of the poetry conferences. [Vignettes, pp. 89-99] It was a workshop that was given by Brewster Chiselin. Do you know his name?

Riess: No.

Arnstein: He's a famous poet, and he was the director of the Utah Writer's Conference at Utah University for many years. There were two sessions which I went to, after my children were grown and my husband had somebody to care for him in the home. [1947, and Ninth Annual, 1956] I wrote this letter about the first conference to Helen. Would you be interested in that?

Riess: I can have a photocopy made, and we can just put it in the book.

Arnstein: I don't like to give this up, it's the only one I have.

Riess: If you would rather read it, that's fine.

Arnstein: Well, if you don't mind?

Salt Lake City  
July 8, 1948

Dear Helen:

This, here, is fun. I feel as though I had taken my brains out of moth balls and hung them up on the line to air--and high time! There are about a hundred people enrolled in the conference, mostly mature folk

Arnstein:

and very brilliant youngsters, and the tone of it all is gracious and informal, the discussions on a very high level.

The poets: William Carlos Williams is a compact, grey man, easy, ardent, down to earth--he is a practising physician--has a ready laugh and is the antithesis of everything academic. A very beautiful poem of his was read last night by Allen Tate. Tate (see enclosed picture) is a sandy, colorless individual; pale blue eyes dominated by an over-sized brow, almost abnormal, and with a skeletal, somewhat goat-like bony structure of head and feature flatteringly concealed in the photograph. He is dry, precise but quick to kindle, as he did when one young man intruded something savoring of the "party line" into this morning's discussions. He made an acid attack upon those who inject politics into irrelevant matters. It was apropos of a poem of Pound's. Last night he read poems of Pound, Wallace Stevens, John Crowe Ransom, John Peale Bishop, Hart Crane and T.S. Eliot. He doesn't read especially well, drops his voice at line ends, and as the acoustics were poor, it wasn't too rewarding. Tonight he, Williams and Ghiselin read their own poems in a better hall. This morning Tate and Williams conducted a session together. The contrast between the two heightened the whole thing; as a matter of fact all the leaders of the conference sit in on all the sessions, asking questions, challenging the speaker, or corroborating him. It makes for a lively setting.

Ghiselin hasn't conducted any meetings, but I had a conference with him this morning at my request, to ask for advice about my manuscripts and whether I should submit some poems beside my stories. I decided I might just as well get as much out of this occasion as possible. He asked me to submit three characteristic (!) poems--you can imagine how hard it is to choose. I've finally chosen A Child Speaks, a few of the animal poems, and Knowing No More. That ought to give an idea of my scope if not of my faults. As to the mss., [he introduced me to a publisher's agent and I had a talk with him, the upshot of which was not too optimistic. He repeated what all the other publishers have said, that the public for that sort of thing is too small. However, he did suggest three firms I might try.]

Arnstein:

The fiction group is fun, particularly Mrs. Caroline Gordon, whose work I don't know. She is handling the novel but much of what she says is applicable to the short story. She's a small, unadorned woman--hair drawn back, with lively brown eyes and a clipped incisive manner of speech. I'll tell you more about her, when I see you. Mark Schorer gave a fine talk this morning. I needn't have come this far to hear him: he's at U.C. His approach to the short story is a novel one, but I think will be helpful. Eric Bentley is one of those brilliant Englishmen who confound one with their erudition and magnificent use of the language.

We've still to hear Walter Van Tilburg Clark (If you haven't read the Oxbow Mystery [sic] of his, do--it's good reading ) and Ray B. West Jr.--though they've both "spoken out in class."

I'm talking to my neighbors and fellow class men in very uncharacteristic extroversion, and though many of them far outstrip me in mentality and learning, I don't seem to be too burdened with inferiority--which is all to the good. I haven't been informed as yet who the critic of my stories is to be--I hope it'll be Williams or Schorer.

The campus is beautiful as to greenery and unobtrusive as to buildings. It's very warm here, but not as yet unbearable. I've a room two blocks away from the college and my meals are of any-campus variety, but as long as the old digestion holds up, I don't mind. I ran into one acquaintance, a Mrs. Scofield, who had been in Muriel's class at the labor school with me, and whom I had liked and driven home after class when we were at state college. I sought her out yesterday, but she seemed somewhat evasive, so I'll wait for her to make the next move. As a matter of fact I'd just as soon meet new people.

I'll enclose a program of the conference which you may enjoy seeing. You might mail this letter to Ethel and Edith, as I haven't written them anything but postals. There's not too much time for letters.

Hope all is well with you and Ans. My best love to you both, and hand a bit on to Harriet if you see her.

Arnstein: On rereading this I note that I haven't offered any of the "pearls of wisdom" the conference has provided. That will have to await our meeting--there'll be much to talk about. Love again.

Forgie.

Riess: Was this the first such opportunity for you?

Arnstein: This was the first time I'd been out alone anywhere on my own.

Riess: Do you mean without your husband?

Arnstein: Yes, or friends.

Riess: Ah.

#### Some of Mrs. Arnstein's Writings

Arnstein: Here's a little article on moments that stand out in one's life, and you might like to take a look at it:

One need not be a mystic to have experienced in one's life certain moments that might almost be called revelations. They stand out as the years pass with a vividness that attended their first appearance. And they need no aura about them, they occur even at inauspicious times, when one is engaged in the most pedestrian of daily tasks.

Such a moment came when at Tiburon when I descended from a ferryboat to be met by an outmoded surrey, in which sat a lady who was to become (all unbeknownst to me then) my mother-in-law, and her two daughters. I had been invited to spend the weekend with them in Belvedere, and as I stepped into the surrey, the thought came: I've never ridden in one of these before.

A patient, plodding horse drew us, and as patient, if not as plodding a driver held the slack reins. I sat beside the lady, the girls crowded next to the driver.

We proceeded slow-paced along a level road, which presently gave on a leafy lane, where the trees bordering it leant toward one another overhead forming



Arnstein: a checkered canopy. And here is where my revelation flashed. The subdued light, the quiet sweep of the bay on my right, on my left the hillside dripping with woven weeds, all called to something in me that said, "I wish I could hold this moment, could write it. It is too beautiful to let it pass." But there were the girls, chattering away, affronting all this beauty. To my own surprise, I leaned toward them and said, "Oh, do be quiet." Appalled myself by this outburst, I looked up to the lady, only to see her smile as though to say, "Yes, my dear." And when her gentle hand patted mine, I felt restored, accepted.

Another such moment came at the birth of my baby brother. As I stood beside the cradle, looking at the little wrinkled face, I was flooded with a tenderness I had never felt before. Impulsively my hand reached for his, so neatly finished, nails and all, and as his palm closed warmly around my finger, I felt, "He is my baby, without any doubt, and to be cherished by me forever and forever."

I have for you the Vignettes book, which I'm going to give you to take with you and bring back. It's got two articles on our wedding trip, on Oberammergau, and several articles on Edith and her horses, and a couple on the language we use, and about my parents, and myself, and some articles about Brewster Ghiselin again whom I've told you about. And Glenway Wescott, the novelist. He was my advisor about my book, No End to Morning, and I've got his letter in here.

[looking at Vignettes] Here's a picture of Brewster Ghiselin. Here's the picture of Herbert Blau whom I studied with out at State. This is an obituary of Chingwah Lee, the man whose place I taught in after I left St. Mary's down in Chinatown. [see p. 85 ] They couldn't give me a room, and then he gave me a room at his place.

Riess: He was connected with Rudolph Schaeffer.

Arnstein: Oh, I had something to do with Rudolph Schaeffer, too. It was a funny experience.

Anyway, you can take that with you if you want when you go.

Riess: All right, wonderful.

Arnstein: So, that's about it.

Arnstein: Now, this about Hughes Mearns. I asked him if he would write me the preface to my book. I felt I had a right to do that because you know what he did? He published two of my children's poems in one of his books without asking me. I was glad to have them published, but still I thought he should have asked my permission. So I thought I had a right to ask him. [laughs] He said, "I sure will write it," and he wrote me, as you know because you've seen it, a very nice preface.

The San Francisco Poetry World

[Interview 6: February 13, 1985]

Arnstein: I read for the Poetry Center when the center was down in the Marina district there, before they were reading out here at San Francisco State.

Riess: I wonder how you would characterize the crowd. What was the audience then?

Arnstein: Students, eager students. They'd all crowd the room, sit on the floor when it was out at State.

Riess: I think there was a greater love of poetry then than there is now.

Arnstein: I don't think it is a greater love. I think now everybody's writing, even children. I belong to the Poetry Society of America and I get the monthly book review. They have pages and pages of new members who are writing.

Riess: What is responsible?

Arnstein: I think the Poetry Center out there at State got a lot going. I really do think Ruth Diamont is responsible for the renaissance of poetry in this part of the country. She's very modest about it, she won't talk about it, but I think it's true. There never was anyone like her before.

Riess: What is the history of that group?

Arnstein: That was started by Mrs. Ruth Diamont. She was the one that had me read down there. She brought important people out from England and elsewhere to read at State. She housed them in her home, and entertained them, any number of them.

Arnstein: Randall Jarrell I had here for some occasion, and I showed him my poems--I think it was Jarrell. When we went upstairs he said to me, "I'm glad to see your things because I miss my students." I didn't feel like a student, I was already a published poet! He criticized everything. I felt very disturbed. My daughter was here, and when he left I said, "Well, he hadn't a good word to say." She said, "Couldn't he find one?" And I said, "Apparently not."\*

[W.S.] Merwin I've heard out here. Josephine Miles, of course, and Marianne Moore.

By the way, in that Vignettes wasn't there a program of the Poetry Society that I went to in New York, a Poetry Society dinner?

Riess: I don't think so.

Arnstein: [looking] Well, it isn't in here apparently.

Riess: Did you work with Josephine Miles, too?

Arnstein: No, but Edith studied with her over in Berkeley.

Riess: There are a lot of woman poets to whom you've sent your work. Looking at your papers at Berkeley, I was struck by how free Sara Bard Field could feel to rewrite your lines.

Arnstein: They were all good corrections, I accepted them all. She was a very good critic.

Riess: The same from Genevieve Taggard.

Arnstein: Yes, she was critical. I sent my early poems on to her. Who else was critical? William Rose Benét. My brother-in-law sent my poems on to him.

Riess: Having read a lot of your correspondence, I'm struck by how willing you were to put your psyche and your production at risk of rejection.

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\*In a letter, dated 1957, from Karl Shapiro to Mrs. Arnstein, he says, "Randall Jarrell and his wife think Forgie the most interesting person they met in San Francisco." [In the Bancroft Library]

Arnstein: You don't write for yourself alone. Somewhere in the background of your mind, there's an audience. You're not too conscious of it while you're writing, but after you finish you really would like to know what they think about your stuff. I told you I had no criteria at all when I first started to write. I didn't know what was good, bad, or indifferent. That has been a long matter of growth.

Riess: Who was your very first critic? Who first saw your group of poems, the first twelve that you wrote?

Arnstein: My sister-in-law, Helen Salz, and she was very generous about them. However, she became very competitive--I told you that--so I didn't show her at the end.

Riess: After Helen looked at them, did you show them to other woman friends?

Arnstein: Well, Sara Bard Field, and she showed them to Marie Welch. Marie Welch also gave me some criticism.

Riess: Was it hard to send all of this material out? Was it hard to deal with the rejection?

Arnstein: Well, the minute you begin to submit to magazines, you expect rejections. Even the great poets get rejections. Edna Millay got no end of them. That's in the cards, you have to expect it. Of course, it doesn't make you feel too happy. I could paper my house with my rejections if I had kept them.

Riess: You must have had occasions when one person would say that "this whole way of wording is correct," and another person would say "it's totally incorrect."

Arnstein: In a book, which I'm not giving you, but I'm willing it to my daughter, and she is to give to the library when she wants to, I've written about an organization that chose poems from various magazines, and then submitted them to different editors for estimates of them. There was no continuity, some were "for" the poems, some "against." Absolutely no agreement. So I always take everything with a grain of salt, because a person's reaction to poetry is very personal and it's not necessarily objective.

Riess: Did you continue to send your work to Sara Bard Field as you produced it?

Arnstein: Up to a time, I don't remember how long.

- Riess: She came to town and had tea parties with you and Helen?
- Arnstein: Yes, she did. I had met her through Helen. She was very devoted to Helen, and vice versa. At first I didn't like her. She seemed very mannered, but afterwards, after I got to know her, I was not conscious of it.
- Riess: I asked Helen, when I interviewed her, whether her own poetry was about her personal turmoil. She said, "No, it was always about other people," poems of indignation against social inequality.
- Arnstein: Oh, yes. Well, she was an extroverted person, and I think she deceived herself in some way because she's written a poem about a man who wanted a wife who was a "dove" in his hand, and the wife had a "sword by her side." I felt that was in a sense her relation to her husband. She kow-towed to him very much, and he didn't know anything about poetry. I thought that her poems were more personal than she knew. I think she did write one about her daughter's death, too.
- Riess: You used poetry as a cathartic experience?
- Arnstein: I didn't use it as a cathartic. It proved to be a cathartic, but I didn't use it for that purpose. I wrote because the ideas came to me and I wrote them down.

#### Mrs. Arnstein's Writing Habits

- Riess: When did you write? What time of day? Did you use a pencil, a pen?
- Arnstein: It depended. The first I wrote any time. I even drove up to the curb and wrote, when I drove the car.
- Riess: Drove up to the curb when your inspiration came to you?
- Arnstein: Yes. The two poems I wrote, the biblical poems, were written at the curb. I didn't even know if they were correct biblically. I rang up Helen, who was a student of the Bible, and I said, "Where can I find these stories?" She told me. I looked them up, they were correct. I must have remembered them somewhere in the background of my mind.



Arnstein: After that, in later times, I've written early in the morning. I eat breakfast, get into bed, then if an idea comes to me-- that's the most fertile time. Now I seldom write during the day.

Riess: When you were writing prose, how did you write then?

Arnstein: That's funny. I didn't write any stories, fiction, until one time I was down in Carmel and I wrote one every day. I don't know how these things came. I put them away, called them Old Stories, and I haven't looked at them again. My daughter said to me the other day, "One of those stories I remember very well, it was very good." So I took them out and read them, and they really were in many ways better than the things I've written in recent times.

Riess: What has happened to the Old Stories?

Arnstein: I have them upstairs. I want to show them to Edith again and see what she thinks about them.

Riess: Did you make any effort to publish them?

Arnstein: One was published. I think you saw that one about Chinatown, "The Ballet Lesson." Wasn't it in that magazine you have with my picture on the front?

Riess: No.

Arnstein: Don't you have that magazine?\* [looking at magazine] The man who wrote this is Phillip Lopate. He was teaching poetry in a New York public school, and he had been using my book on poetry teaching. He wrote me and said he was coming to San Francisco, and could he interview me. I said yes, and I invited him to lunch. He brought a tape recorder. We had a discussion first, at lunch.

Then in the magazine he placed excerpts from Dear Harriet, which you said you saw, and from No End to Morning.

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\*Teachers and Writers Magazine, Vol. 8, Issue 2, 1977. Article by Phillip Lopate, "Time as an Ally: Homage to Aunt Forgie," and excerpts from Dear Harriet, and No End to Morning. See Appendix J.

## PUBLICATION

"I Met Death One Clumsy Day"

Riess: I see you had some correspondence with Robert Coles. [1968-1970]

Arnstein: I had a lot of correspondence. That's over there, too. [The Bancroft Library] He was a delightful man. I met him when he was out here giving a talk under the auspices of Mt. Zion Hospital. He told me he would write a preface to my Dear Harriet if I ever got it published, which I've never been able to do.

Riess: What was it that occurred when he was out here? Apparently he'd had a very unpleasant time.

Arnstein: He told me that the people at Mt. Zion Hospital said, when he quoted the children's poems, that they thought he had doctored them. He said, "They doubted me. You know perfectly well what children can do. I was just disgusted with the crowd."

Riess: One of the articles that you had written was called, "I Met Death One Clumsy Day."

Arnstein: Didn't I show you that? It was a very strange thing. After I'd left Presidio Open Air School, I taught at Hamlin's and at Marin Country Day School. Many of the children were writing poems about death, which surprised me, because in all the years I had taught at the other school there were hardly any poems written about death, and none of them about personal death. But these children were writing about personal death. I thought, "We're living in a frightening era--the bomb age."

Arnstein: I'll tell you an interesting story: I had a group of eighth grade boys over at Marin Country Day School, in an elective course in the afternoon. They came the first year, and the second year. One day I was proceeding as usual and they started in to wisecrack and interrupt and generally cut-up in a way which they'd never done before. I said, "What's happening here? Do you act like this in your other classes?" They said, "No."

I said, "Well, I don't understand. This is an elective, and evidently you like it because you've come a second year. I just can't understand what's happening." There wasn't any response. Finally I said, "I'll give you two options. You can either stay here and write, or you can go back to your own room." They stayed. Not only did they stay, they wrote. And what was unusual, they helped me replace all the chairs that I had taken out for the course.

Going home I thought, "Now, what happened? I can't figure it out. Have I been too permissive and are they taking advantage of me?" No kids had ever done that, but I thought, "It may happen." I puzzled and puzzled about this.

At the next session I had an inspiration. I said, "What were you doing last meeting the morning before I came?" They said, "We had tests all morning." That was it! They were letting off steam. They'd been tense all morning, and their behavior had no relation to what we were doing. It never happened again.

Riess: Was it at that time that you also were noting this interest in death?

Arnstein: Yes. In fact one of the boys said to me, a Japanese-American, "Bring us some poems on war." I'm a pacifist and I didn't want to do that. I said, "I don't think I want to." Well, driving home and going over things in my mind I thought, "Why am I so arbitrary? If they want poems on war, there must be some reason for that." Some good fairy came to my aid and said, "Here's an idea. Give them poems of every age and the attitudes taken to war. I began with, "I could not love thee dear so much, loved I not honor more," went on to the "Charge of the Light Brigade," then to poems of Siegfried Sassoon and all who were against war. I thought, "I will show them how the attitude towards war has changed over the years."

They plunged into a very interesting discussion after this, and all were against war. I said, "I wish adults thought the way you do." One boy said, "It will be different when we grow up." [laughs] It hasn't been any different, but anyway.

### Other Teaching Situations

Arnstein: I quit at the Marin School because they made no provision for me.

The reason I was teaching in those two schools was after my first book came out I was asked to give talks, and I gave a talk down in Garden View, I think near Disneyland. Two teachers came up to me after my talk, from these two schools mentioned, and asked if I would be willing to take a class at their schools. They said they'd have to clear it with their principals, but they thought they'd be agreeable. I had nothing to do at that time and I said, "Yes, I would be glad to do that."

The principal from the school in Marin rang me up and said that his teacher had recommended me, and would I take a class? I said, "Yes, I will be glad to, but I would like to come over and have a talk with you first, and tell you a little bit about my approach." He said, "That's not necessary. I trust my teachers." Well, he never, for the year and a half I was there, came into my room. He never knew what was going on. I might have been telling them God knows what, but he wrote me the most flattering letter, saying how much the children were enjoying the work.

The first year I taught in the library, and the librarian was agreeable. We took a table at the far end of the room and the children were quiet. The second year there was another librarian. When I came in she said, "You can't have a class in this room, it disturbs me." I said, "The children are very quiet, we'll sit in the far corner." She said, "I can't have it. Take them outside." I said, "I can't. One of the boys is allergic and we had to stay indoors." She made no provision for me.

I spoke to the eighth grade teacher that had engaged me and said, "Look, I have no place to teach." She said, "I'll find a place for you." She found a fourth grade room that had a young man teacher. The room was a chaos, books on the floor, papers, clothes all over. There wasn't a place you could put a book. I said to him, "Look, I have to have some place where I can at least put a book. And the kids keep running in and out of the room. I can't teach in a situation like that. I have to have quiet when I'm teaching." He said, "Lock the door." You know what happened, of course, the kids came and banged on the door. There was nothing for me to do, so I quit.

Riess: Hamlin's was all girls?

Arnstein: It was all girls, yes.

Riess: Is it better working with girls than boys?

Arnstein: No, no difference, except in those days--you had to set the stage for poems. When you had boys, you had to convince them that poetry wasn't "sissy." I brought them a lot of Carl Sandburg, and poems of that kind.

### Publishing

Riess: Your getting Adventure into Poetry into publication took ten years?

Arnstein: Yes, I put it on the shelf.

Riess: Charlotte Mack--.

Arnstein: Charlotte Mack was a very interesting woman, immensely concerned with children. She instituted a service at Children's Hospital in which she accompanied a child who was going to be operated on into the operating room and explained as much as the child could understand. When the child came out of the operation, she went back to the ward with him. One child was in bed and said to her, "Your lap is empty." So, she lifted him into her lap. The child vomited all over her but she didn't move. She kept that child in her arms as long as he needed her. Then, she took off her dress and went home.

I thought she would be interested in the children's poems. I showed them to her, and she was terribly enthusiastic. She said, "These ought to be published." My husband suggested that I take them to the Rosenberg Foundation. The head of it said, "Well, sure, I'll take you over to Berkeley where there's a woman named Quail Hawkins." She was employed by the famous bookstore in Berkeley.

Riess: Yes, the Sather Gate Bookstore.

Arnstein: "She will give us advice about it."

Quail Hawkins told me to send it down to Stanford, which I did.



Jacket flaps of 1951 edition.

## ADVENTURE INTO *Poetry*

By FLORA J. ARNSTEIN

As a teacher and artist, Mrs. Flora J. Arnstein possesses two rare gifts. She knows the way into the inner spirit of childhood, and she knows how to bring out the child's dormant power for poetic expression. Through long experience with her pupils at San Francisco's Presidio Open-Air School, she has perfected a method for enticing verse of depth and vigor from young children.

Writing of her experiences with child communication, Mrs. Arnstein says:

"Children are naturally creative. One has only to watch them playing to be convinced of this fact. They pretend, invent situations, imagine settings, and the more immersed they are in the creative aspect of their play, the happier they seem to be. Unfortunately, conventional education takes too little cognizance of this creative urge. It would almost seem as though our shutting off of creative expression were deliberate. And yet, if the creative urge were harnessed to the service of learning, how much more effective and alive would learning be.

"Creative language, picturesque expression, come to the young child as naturally as speech. When Eric, at three, says, 'I can't look at the sun long. It makes my eyes all out of breath,' he is describing one

*(Continued on back flap)*

(Continued from front flap)

sensation in terms of another, employing a sort of unconscious image. Likewise Jane, who in an elevator inquires soberly, 'What shelf are we getting off at?' is making telling use of an expressive metaphor."

Encouraged by such a statement as "Say it in your own words" or "Write it down just as it comes to you," a seven-year-old boy quickly begins to write of the ocean with originality and insight:

The ocean is *rattling*,  
And the sea is *rearing*.  
It makes a moaning sound,  
Just as if it was hurt  
To have the boats go over it.

In the Foreword to this book, Mr. Hughes Mearns, chairman of the Department of Creative Education, New York University, says:

"Flora Arnstein belongs to that small but growing group of artist teachers who know that guided self-expression opens up important paths not only to cultural living but also to learning, to morality, and to health; that each revelation of the inner spirit thus successfully handled by adult guidance has canceled at once a hundred personal and social problems of the faraway future."

STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS  
Stanford, California

- Riess: After you published Adventure into Poetry, in 1951, you were on the lecture circuit for a while?
- Arnstein: I was asked to lecture up and down the coast and in the city. It was really a new field then, you see. Nowadays, everybody's writing, but not then.
- Riess: Having the book published by Stanford is why it was so well-known?
- Arnstein: I think that lent it a certain prestige, I imagine so, though they don't do much advertising. That's the only disadvantage of being published by a university; they send out notices to various colleges, but they don't do the kind of advertising that a commercial publisher does.
- Riess: Have you received royalties from your books?
- Arnstein: No, no royalties. For the second book I had published, Poetry in the Elementary Classroom [1962], I was given an option. If I published it under my own name, and not under the auspices of the National Council of Teachers of English, I would receive royalties. But if I published it under the name of the National Council of Teachers of English, they would get the royalties. I was not interested in the royalties, I didn't need the money, so I said I was concerned with which would give me the better circulation. They said the better circulation would come if I let it be done by the teachers. So I got no royalties there. From Stanford I was promised royalties after a certain amount of books had been sold, but they never published enough for me to get any. [laughs]
- Riess: Since it came out in the Dover edition [renamed Children Write Poetry, 1967] have you gotten royalties?
- Arnstein: No. Dover paid me a lump sum for it, a very small sum. The Stanford editor was horrified. When I told him, he said, "Don't give it to them when they offer you a sum like that. Let us try to sell it for you." They tried to sell it to the paperbacks, but unsuccessfully. After a year they gave me back my rights to do what I wanted with it. I wrote again to Dover and asked if they were still interested in the book. They said they were, so they gave me five hundred dollars or less, I don't know.
- I did make some money. I taught at a school somewhere down on the Peninsula, Hillsborough I think it was, for seven weeks. I got \$100 a week for that, for one session, so I made \$700. But actually, if I had to live on what I made from poetry, I would have been dead long since. [laughs]

- Riess: How about the various poetry magazines? Did any of them pay?
- Arnstein: Most of them don't pay. The only one that paid was Poetry, while Harriet Monroe was editor. \* I don't know whether they still pay.
- Riess: I was interested to read that at the Utah Writer's Conference you could have a full-length book read and critiqued for fifteen dollars, which seems like a great bargain.
- Arnstein: Well, it was. Glenway Wescott was a critic, and he was wonderful. If you have my Vignettes, you see what he said about this book. [Vignettes, pp. 92-95]
- Riess: You were showing him No End to Morning?
- Arnstein: Yes. He said it wouldn't be publishable, because he said it wasn't striking enough. He wanted me to make it much more philosophical and to insert commentaries. I don't know whether I didn't want to do that because I didn't think I could, or because I liked it the way it was.
- Riess: What do you think now? What was the answer? You didn't do it because you liked it the way it was?
- Arnstein: Yes, I think so, and I didn't want to expose my relatives. He wanted me to invent occurrences. He said, "What have you done with your grandfather? He's a wonderful character, the way you have him at first." I said, "I've done nothing." "It's a pure waste. You should bring him in again." Well, that would have had to be fiction, and I didn't want to get into fiction. I felt a kind of commitment to truth.
- Riess: He wanted you to make more moral points.
- Arnstein: Which I didn't want to do either.
- Riess: Your writings since then have been in somewhat the same vein, short chapters, one vision, one idea.
- Arnstein: Yes. Well, I gave you the one "On Gerontology," and I've written short articles, and short stories. I haven't written any long books except the Dear Harriet.

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\*See Appendix K.

### Writing Classes

Riess: In your writing classes, you haven't been urged to write a longer narrative? You've taken so many writing classes.

Arnstein: I haven't been in many writing classes.

Riess: No?

Arnstein: No, just the class with Walter Van Tilburg Clark, and a class with Mr. [Lawrence] Hart. [Essays written for Clark class, ca. 1960, are in The Bancroft Library.]

Riess: Tell me about working with Lawrence Hart.

Arnstein: He was in the extension of the University of California, and was very stimulating, but I quit him after a short time. He was very disorganized. First of all, he would never read a whole poem, he would read only the images and discuss them. He made an excellent study of the use of imagery, but he was so disorganized, he never could find the illustrations. He'd come in to class with an armful of books, and spend the whole time trying to find what he wanted to illustrate.

I said to one of the girls who adored him, "You could do something for Mr. Hart. Why don't you organize his material so he can find his illustrations?" "Oh," she said, "I wouldn't dare touch anything of his." [laughs]

I liked him. He once told me, "Every time people begin to write well, they leave me." I could have told him why. He was so restrictive and so disorganized. I sent him my book that was privately printed and he said he would write me a critique of it; I never had it from him.

He's received a grant now, and he's putting out a magazine once a month, the discussion of poetry. It's poor, I think. His wife, whose name is McGahey, writes well, and his son writes.

He goes far out in his suggestions. For instance, one of the things he told us to do, I remember, was to go into a Woolworth's store, and take a word like "house," then select everything that is related or not to house. That's not my idea of writing a poem.

Riess: Little exercises.



Arnstein: I don't know whether they're exercises. Many people felt they were helpful. I was much stimulated by him, but he was a little cuckoo.

Riess: Did he give you some good criticisms?

Arnstein: Oh yes, very good. He was anti-literary; anything that sounded too literary or derived he always struck out.

Oh, and I did go into a fiction class. I forget the woman's name now. It was while I was writing No End to Morning. I was puzzled about whether I should write in adult language, or whether I was committed to write in a child's use of words. So I joined this class, but it was all slanted toward publication, where to publish, and how to arrange to do so. I wasn't interested in that, writing just for publication. Those are the only two classes I can remember, but I took a correspondence course in poetry.

Riess: Where was that?

Arnstein: Lucia Trent and Ralph Chaney, I don't know where they were. They issued a magazine called Palms, and it has many of my poems in it. You'll have seen that over there.

Riess: Was that class useful?

Arnstein: Yes, in some way, but [laughs] some way not. I remember one thing she said, apropos of a quotation I had made from the Bible. She said, "You cannot do this. There are too many s's." Evidently she didn't know her Bible. So I just discarded that suggestion.

Riess: When you turn your material over to someone and discover they're fallible, it's a little disconcerting.

Arnstein: That's funny you say that because I think one of my strengths with the children was that I was always willing to admit when I didn't know. If they felt I was fallible then they didn't feel so self-conscious if they were. Children are very tolerant, and very forgiving.

Riess: And you were less forgiving of the people who were attempting to teach you?

Arnstein: I wasn't as forgiving, I just didn't accept what was not according to my outlook.

Riess: The class that you took with Walter Van Tilburg Clark, was that the first such critical writing class you'd ever done?

Arnstein: I don't think so, because before that I'd studied over in Berkeley, a course with [Benjamin] Lehman on the Bible as literature.

Clark was a very interesting man. You know all about him because it's written down in that book. [Vignettes, pp. 99-101]

Riess: You also refer to having wanted to take a class with [Wallace] Stegner.

Arnstein: Yes, and what happened was it was just before I started to write poetry, so I was no longer interested in writing fiction.

Riess: Were there periods in your life when the poetry would be exclusive?

Arnstein: Once I wrote poetry I didn't write anything else, until that time I went down to Carmel and I told you I wrote stories. I wrote on and off all the time. It wasn't continuous. Sometimes I'd have fallow periods. I hope they were fallow. [laughs]

Riess: Lengthening Days, did that follow right on the heels of No End to Morning, or was it written much later?

Arnstein: Much later.

Riess: And The Vignettes, are they recent?

Arnstein: Yes, some are written fairly recently. When I say "fairly recently," maybe during fifteen years. [laughs]

Riess: Why did you start this kind of writing fifteen years ago?

Arnstein: I never know why I write things, I told you. They just come, out of the blue.

Riess: Speaking of time, how have your teachers over the years dealt with the fact that you're probably the oldest person in their classes?

Arnstein: At Berkeley I wasn't very comfortable. I felt people treated me as aged, though I wasn't old then, but I was older than the students. Out at [San Francisco] State they never made any distinction, I might have been any age. I felt at home, easy, though one time when I was there Edith, my daughter, was taking her master's and Becky, my granddaughter, was getting her first degree. So there were three generations of us on the campus. [laughs]

Riess: Were there other older returned students?

Arnstein: I didn't know any.

Riess: Reading your correspondence [1950], I wondered if anything more developed with Mr. [Henry] Schaeffer-Simmern. [His work was on artistic development in children, and parallels in primitive art. He taught at the University of California, Berkeley.]

Arnstein: No, that one letter was all. He was an odd man, very German as certain Prussian-Germans are, very decisive. You couldn't disagree with him. He was always right. What he wanted me to do was to do a similar thing to what he had done with children's art. He wanted me to trace the development of language in poetry. You can't trace that because children talk long before they write, and I said it couldn't be done. He said I just didn't understand. [laughs]

Riess: I think probably what he meant is, if you wanted to do it, you could have.

Arnstein: [laughs] That's it. That was the only contact I had with him.

## REACHING OUT, OBLIQUELY

Poetry Group, 1974

Riess: In 1974 (?) you had a poetry group that Elizabeth Elkus was attending.

Arnstein: I don't know what the date was, but she was in that group, and Eric, my grandson, and some of our friends, and Rachel. They came here in the evenings.

They wrote spontaneously. I never asked anybody to write. I might say, "Would you care to write?" at times. I don't even think I said that. They wrote spontaneously.

Riess: How often did they meet?

Arnstein: Once a week.

Riess: That's a lot of time to put into this.

Arnstein: I'd always have to prepare a program for the session, just a few poems and we'd discuss them. I never taught poetry, I told you that, I always proceeded obliquely. I might say, "Doesn't this poet notice things carefully?" Then, people who were writing would think it's a good idea to notice things carefully. You see, it was oblique. Or I'd say, "Isn't this a telling image?" Then they'd think, "Telling images are good." But I never taught head on.

Riess: This is the technique I know you used with the children, but also with adults?

Arnstein: Yes, also with adults. I don't believe in comments on poems because people misapply them. If you suggest obliquely, they take up only what they're ready for. That's legitimate, I feel-- as they grow they accept more and more.

- Riess: But adults are already full of intellectual notions and critical standards.
- Arnstein: I know. But because I don't bring these into the discussions, they just fall by the wayside.
- Riess: So it was Elizabeth, and Eric, and Rachel.
- Arnstein: Sue Bransten was also in a class.
- Riess: Was it recreational for them, or did they really go on to work with poetry?
- Arnstein: I don't know what they did outside of the sessions. Elizabeth originally said she couldn't write at all, and then one day she came with a whole sheaf of poems that she'd written spontaneously at home. What they did otherwise, I don't know. Eric has never published anything, but he still writes, and very well.

#### Commentary on Correspondence

- Riess: Speaking of Elizabeth Elkus, her son Jonathan Elkus sounds like an interesting man.
- Arnstein: Yes. Some of my animal poems he put to music, I don't know if you know that.
- Riess: I saw in the correspondence that you wrote for him on peace, from the Bible. [1957]
- Arnstein: He had wanted to enter a statewide competition. He asked me if I had any ideas to offer. I don't know whether he suggested peace, or I did. I leafed through the Bible and found in the concordance all that was written about peace. I sent him the whole thing and said, "Take what you want from this."
- Riess: Did Jonathan win the prize?
- Arnstein: No, he didn't. I don't know whether he ever entered the competition.
- Riess: Another item in the correspondence: Julie Heyneman helped get one of your poems published?



Arnstein: Yes. I had studied art with her in San Francisco, but I was the worst person to be in an art class. I have no visual ability at all. However, I had shown her some poems, and as she was then in England she sent them to the London Mercury. They were accepted as well as another poem later on. I forget which one it was.

Riess: You sent them with just your initials, F.J.A.

Arnstein: I may have, I don't remember.

Riess: As if you were being somewhat anonymous. I wondered why?

Arnstein: I don't know myself. I didn't even know that.

Riess: I thought it was interesting that you sent some of your material to Edith Lehman. That was Edith Altschul before her marriage?

Arnstein: Yes. I did, because she knew of a man who was interested in poetry, and she would send them to him. I think his letter is in there, too.

Riess: Who is Mrs. Maynard Shipley?

Arnstein: She was a well-known poet here in San Francisco, Miriam Allen DeFord. She did a very interesting piece of work, too. She wrote a book which was longitudinal, in the sense that it contained dates and epochs, let's say, 1775. Each page had different categories: what had happened in politics, in art, in music. This was longitudinal. I gave it to somebody who was studying because it's a wonderful book for reference. I'm sure it is over in The Bancroft Library.

Miriam Allen DeFord was in correspondence with me a lot. She liked my poems.

Riess: James Schwabacher was one of your students, wasn't he?

Arnstein: Yes. He took me out to lunch not so long ago. He's been a very faithful friend. I had him in my poetry class, and when I was teaching music.

There's a funny story about the music. One day he came into the music class and his voice sounded very funny. He was studying with a music teacher, Mrs. Moore, who had been teaching previously at the school but now was teaching privately. He planned to become a tenor. He was about twelve years old. I thought his voice was breaking. I said to him, "Jimmy, I don't

Arnstein: know anything about voices, but if you want to be a singer I don't want to be responsible for spoiling your chances. You ask Mrs. Moore whether it's all right for you to sing now. If she says it's all right, you can go ahead in this class."

I rang up his mother that night and she burst out laughing. I said, "What are you laughing about?" "Jimmy's voice isn't changing," she said, "he's crazy about a tenor that's on the victrola, and he's bought all his records and he's trying to imitate him." But she added, "Don't tell him that I told you." Next day when he came to class I said to him, "Jimmy, what did your teacher say?" He hadn't seen his teacher as yet. I said, "If you keep your voice within your own range, I think it will be all right for you to sing." So he did.

Riess: When did the San Francisco Boys Chorus start?

Arnstein: Oh, way back, I don't know. Davy, Edith's son, was in the chorus for many years. It's still existing under somebody else's direction, but I don't subscribe to it anymore. I used to when Madi Bacon led it.

Riess: Are you a friend of Madi's?

Arnstein: No, I wasn't a friend of hers.

Riess: How about Ernst Bacon, her composer brother?

Arnstein: Oh yes, I knew of him. I didn't know him personally. He gave concerts around here. Helen knew him, she may have talked about him in her book, I don't know.

Riess: It sounds as though Helen gave many parties to introduce people, that sort of thing.

Arnstein: Yes.

Riess: Did you do much of that?

Arnstein: No, none. Helen made a dinner party the way another person would make a fancy cake. She'd have one person for his or her looks, and another person that was witty, and so on. It was very carefully planned. [laughs]

Riess: That often works beautifully.

Arnstein: Yes. Her husband told her not to talk too much, to bring other people out, which she did too.

Riess: Was that part of your life, doing a certain amount of business or public health entertaining?

Arnstein: No, I never did any of that.

Riess: Did you do your own cooking over the years?

Arnstein: No, only after we moved up here, during the Second World War, when there were no servants to be had, and there was no way of their getting here except by a trolley that stopped way down the hill. So then I began to do my own cooking. I used to ring up my daughters and say, "How do you cook this?" I did it, and I enjoyed it. I used to have as many as twenty-two people here for Christmas Eve dinner.

#### Leo Eloesser

Riess: Were you a friend of Leo Eloesser?

Arnstein: My husband was a good friend of his. They had gone to kindergarten, to the Urban School, even to college together. They graduated at fifteen from the Urban School, took the examinations for Berkeley and flunked. Then they went back to the school for a year and took the exams again, and passed.

Originally Eloesser wanted to become a violinist. Then he decided to become a chemist, and finally a surgeon. He operated on my husband, and on me, and he never would charge us anything. My husband was then in business and told him, "When you come to buy a suit, I don't give you the suit. You pay for the material. Now you're giving me your services, why shouldn't I pay for them?" He wouldn't agree. He said, "I tell you what you do. You send a contribution to the Austrian children." (This was during the First World War.) My husband said, "I will not. I do my own charity, you can do yours." So he sent a check to Leo, and received the check back endorsed by the Austrian Children's Fund. [laughs]

Also he had little dachshunds that he took on his rounds to the hospital. Also he escorted a lot of ladies. One time he went to St. Luke's Hospital and left the lady sitting in his car, forgot about her, and took a street car. [laughs]

He had operated on me, and when I was recovering I went down to have a dressing at St. Luke's Hospital. He had attended to me and I sat in the hall waiting for a taxi. He came and

Arnstein: stood in front of me saying, "I'm Dr. Eloesser." I said, "Oh, Leo, you just finished with me." He turned on his heel and walked away.

His biography is doctored, it's complimentary, with none of his negative attributes mentioned.

He was devoted to Jon Elkus. He invited him down to Mexico when he was living there. To Elizabeth's second son, Benedict, he was disagreeable. She never knew why. He was an eccentric man, that's all you could say. He lived with a woman in Mexico, and my husband thought he was married to her so he congratulated him. Leo said, "I'm not married."

Riess: But he sounds like he was a great favorite.

Arnstein: He was the surgeon in the city, very skillful. He was so small that he had to stand on a stool when he operated.

Riess: Interesting that someone so eccentric could be trusted with life.

Arnstein: Well, he was, he was amazing that way. Absolutely ethical. He treated for free artists, musicians, composers, anybody in the arts. But anybody that had money, he charged heavily. When he operated on Helen Salz, my brother-in-law said, "How much do I owe you?" Leo said, "How much did you pay for that picture on the wall?" (It was a Russian picture.) My brother-in-law told him the price. He said, "All right, send me that amount." A big sum. So he stung the rich, and he gave to the poor. He had a lot of virtues, and a lot of foibles.

When he lived in Mexico he treated people free if they would come at eight o'clock in the morning, poor Mexicans, farmers around there. If they came later in the day he wouldn't treat them. Eight o'clock or not at all.

Riess: Did he have a family here?

Arnstein: He had two sisters in San Francisco. One was neurotic, manifested in all kinds of diseases that nobody could diagnose, and she died very young. The second sister he liked. He lived with her when he came up here, and it is she who gave most of the information for the book. That's why it's so flattering, because she just adored him.

He hated his sister-in-law. He had a brother who became sick. Leo was living in Los Angeles then, and his sister-in-law wrote him, "Would he come up and take a look at his brother?"

Arnstein: He said, "No, there are plenty of good surgeons in San Francisco." She never forgave him, and he couldn't bear her. I don't know how he came to be riding in a car with her, but he dropped her on the street in the middle of the city. [laughs] He was an odd one.

Riess: Are you telling what are well known "Leo tales," or was he a good friend of yours so that you knew all of these things?

Arnstein: He was not a friend of mine ever, he was a friend of my husband's. Afterwards, when he used to come and visit us, he'd say--my husband was working in the health field then--"How's syphilis?" So he wasn't very welcome here.

### Correspondence, Continued

[Interview 7: February 27, 1985]

[Before interview begins, Mrs. Arnstein gives the interviewer six old family photographs, to be copied for the oral history, and a group of letters to send to the Manuscripts Division of The Bancroft Library. The letters are from Mrs. Countee Cullen, granting Mrs. Arnstein permission to read a Countee Cullen poem ("Incident") on a radio program. Letter dated Nov. 5, 1949;

Carolyn Kizer, Editor, Poetry Northwest, Seattle, sent suggestions to Mrs. Arnstein for improvement of work submitted, and asking, "How old are you? Have you done any work at S.F. State?" Letter dated 24 March 1964. Mrs. Arnstein answered "Seventy-nine years young," and it has been "unique in [her] experience for an editor to take the trouble to comment and offer suggestions;"

Correspondence between John Logan of The Nation and "Dear Flora," 1968; from Karl Shapiro, editor, Prairie Schooner, rejection, but request for more poems.

From Edith R. Mirrieles, managing editor, The Pacific Spectator, A Journal of Interpretation (published by the Pacific Coast Committee for the Humanities of the American Council of Learned Societies) responding to a request for guidance in story-writing from Mrs. Arnstein, April 22, 1951;

A "mental health week" Sunday program, featuring music, dance, and books, with short talks by Dr. Howard Thurman, Mrs. Flora Arnstein, Dr. Harry and Mrs. Bonaro Overstreet;



A letter from Charles J. Hitch, inspired by Mrs. Arnstein's California Living piece, "Growing up in the Nineties" published April 11, 1976. (Regarding that, Mrs. Arnstein has written, "I have been greatly surprised at the response to my article, 'Growing Up in the Nineties,' which appeared in California Living of the San Francisco Examiner and Chronicle on April 11th. Apparently more of my contemporaries are about than I had thought. I have had phone calls and letters from strangers, telling me that the incidents I had described brought their own youth to mind, with similar experiences to mine. One woman rather pathetically stated that she no longer had anyone with whom she could reminisce about the 'olden days.' Another said, 'Please write some more,' and when I countered that I thought I had exhausted the subject, a man interposed, "no, where that came from there must be more");

A handwritten letter from Harriet Monroe, editor, Poetry, A Magazine of Verse. Mrs. Arnstein commented that "she [H.M.] never ever typed a letter." Letter dated Nov. 18, 1929, a rejection, but the statement that she was interested in future work;

A letter, re "Growing Up in the Nineties," correcting Mrs. Arnstein, saying she must have played with Starr King's grandchildren, to which Mrs. Arnstein agreed;

A letter from Ruth Witt Diamont. \*

Riess: I looked at the collection of correspondence in The Bancroft Library about the Poetry Center. ["Its purpose was to integrate poetry with the cultural life of the city by bringing poets of national and international reputation to the west coast to read and discuss their work, and by presenting, also, well known local poets and poets whose work was new and unpublished." Readings took place at the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and at the Telegraph Hill Neighborhood Association. Mrs. Arnstein read on May 18, 1957.]

What did Deborah Johansen, your publisher, do for you?

Arnstein: She printed that book of my own poems.

Riess: Light Widening?

Arnstein: Light Widening, yes.

Riess: Did she act as agent for any of your stories, or any of your work?

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\*See Appendix L.

Arnstein: No, she didn't at all. There was a man in Berkeley who was a promoter, or whatever you call it, he sent things around to magazines and to various publishers. He sent mine for two years, and then he said he didn't want to continue any longer.

Riess: Who was he?

Arnstein: I can't remember his name. You'll probably find it in one of my books, in one of my letters.

Riess: Did you actually meet Carolyn Kizer? [1964 letter]

Arnstein: Yes, she came here. She was flattering about one of my poems. She said it was the best poem on blindness since Milton, which I think was a mistake on her part, for it was not upon blindness. Anyway, the praise was good for my ego.

Riess: Karl Shapiro [1957 letter], did you meet him?

Arnstein: No.

Riess: In your 1948 letter from Utah [see page 104], you mentioned "Muriel's class at the labor school." What was that?

Arnstein: Muriel Rukeyser lived in my house, in the basement. Dave [Jenkins] brought her out because he was the head of the Labor School and he asked me to offer her a room. He said, "She has no place to stay. Could she stay at your place?" I said, "If she doesn't mind a basement room she can." I was never very responsive to her, nor am I to her poetry, though she's very highly regarded. I think some of her poems are all right, but she doesn't click with me somehow.

Riess: What kind of a curriculum did the Labor School have?

Arnstein: Every kind of thing you can imagine. Labor history, poetry, I don't remember. It was a fairly widespread curriculum.

Riess: Did you take other poetry work there?

Arnstein: Did I take other? No, she was the only one that conducted that.

#### Neighborhood Mothers Group

Riess: Now, today, I want to make sure I haven't missed hearing about any of the groups that you have started.

Arnstein: I don't think I've talked to you about the groups of mothers that I got together for advice on handling children's problems. It grew out of the fact that my neighbor was yelling at her kids all the time. There was a program in the city, run by Mrs. Miller, to discuss with mothers how to handle children's problems. I thought to myself that people like this woman over next door, who had a toddler, couldn't get down where the program was being given, so it might be a good idea if a group were started in the neighborhoods. I spoke to my husband about it, and he sent me down to the Rosenberg Foundation where I was told to do a door-to-door poll of mothers.

I went around, and said, "Would you be interested in a program about handling children?" The answer was always, "How much does it cost?" I said, "It doesn't cost anything, it's a free program provided by the city." Then I said, "May I come in and explain it to you?" I secured about twenty-two signatures. One attraction was that the fathers weren't needed; they could stay home and babysit. The mothers came to my house for a year or a year and a half, I don't remember how long. I didn't think Mrs. Miller was very good. I think I could have handled the program better myself, but anyway, the mothers learned from each other.

Riess: How did she handle the program?

Arnstein: What she did was to ask what problems they had, and they would tell her, and she would make suggestions of how to handle them. A funny thing happened. One woman said that her baby of two years had dinner with them every night, and as the husband worked at night, that was the only time they had together. The baby was disrupting this always. One of the mothers said, "Why don't you feed the baby and put her to bed earlier?" She said, "Oh, I thought you weren't supposed to separate a family." [laughs]

Riess: It's rather touching, isn't it? The isolation that people exist in.

Arnstein: I know. I started another group in the daytime, for those mothers who had toddlers, and who couldn't leave them. I secured two nursery school teachers, and got the use of a basement in the home of one of the women. The nursery school teachers took care of the toddlers while the mothers were studying with Mrs. Miller. That went on for a year or so.

Riess: Was that all in this immediate neighborhood?

Arnstein: Yes.

- Riess: Did they know who you were when you came knocking on the door to do your poll?
- Arnstein: No, nobody knew me.
- Riess: Was it considered a success by the Rosenberg Foundation?
- Arnstein: I never knew whether it was a success or not. As far as I was concerned I didn't think it was successful, but I think the mothers got something out of it.
- Riess: Why wasn't it so successful?
- Arnstein: As I said, I don't think Mrs. Miller was very good as a teacher; we should have had a better person as advisor. But the mothers got a lot from each other, as in the instance I mentioned. Anyway, the mothers were able to air their troubles, and to find out that many mothers had similar problems, that children were always losing their car tickets. [laughs]
- Riess: Do you think any of the women maintained a group of their own?
- Arnstein: I wouldn't know whether they did or not.
- Riess: Do you think that you started the program out of a wish that you had had something like that when you had children?
- Arnstein: No, I did it because of this woman's yelling at her child.

#### Poetry Group, 1956

- Riess: I saw a reference once to a poetry group that Anne Perlman attended. [1956]
- Arnstein: It was a group that Anne, I think, got together. Oh yes, I'll tell you how that happened. She had asked me whether I'd teach her little eight-year-old daughter. I said, "Yes," if she'd get enough children together. Then I said, "I've had a pet project in my mind a long time, and that is, I would like to work with some of the mothers whose children were studying with me, so they might see what the creative process is really like, and not block their children."

She tried to get the mothers of these kids, but some of them were working and she wasn't able to get them. She did assemble twelve women to come to poetry sessions. They came for two years.

Arnstein: Anne never knew that she could write, she'd never written before. One day, I asked her to stay after the group. I said, "Anne, I don't like to criticize or compliment anyone in the group. If I do it has an effect on all of the rest. But I want you to know that you're the only person that's really writing poetry." She burst out crying, and she said, "I can't do it anymore." I said, "Why?" "Because," she said, "it upsets me so much." I think it was her first contact with the unconscious process in writing.

Ten years later she went to State to take a master's degree, which she earned by submitting a book of poetry. She studied with [Mark] Linenthal, and he evidently was a very fine teacher. He taught her, and Shirley Kaufman studied with him, and she and Anne felt they'd learned a great deal.



## ASPECTS OF POEM-MAKING

Further Poetic Criteria Search, Again

- Riess: I don't see how you could run a group without the participants knowing that one person is really doing something quite marvelous, and the next person is not.
- Arnstein: If you don't criticize and you don't praise, people are not looking for that. What I did was, if anybody had anything good in a poem I would say, "That's very nice." Something neutral that nobody else could feel offended by. What happens if you praise one person is that then the others always feel inferior to the person that you've praised. Also, if you blame them, people keep wondering whether their things are good enough.
- Riess: It just seems like a very hard atmosphere to maintain.
- Arnstein: Not at all, it's very easy. People get so they don't look for criticism. They look for the good thing in every poem. Praise and blame are inappropriate because you don't know where anybody is in his own readiness.
- Riess: How about making distinctions between the thought that's in the poem, and how the thought is phrased? Could you praise the thought?
- Arnstein: No, I don't believe in analyzing poems at all. I think the poem should stand on its own feet. Analysis is the academic approach, and that's why it's so futile, it doesn't accomplish anything. One of the teachers of creative writing said, "All my pupils wrote when they came to me, but they don't write anymore." I could have told him why. It was because he criticized, and then everybody became scared and didn't write.

Riess: How would you conduct this group of adult women then? They would come and each read from what they had done?

Arnstein: No, I never asked them to write. Either they were able to write spontaneously or they didn't write at all. I might ask, "Would you care to write?" If they say, "No," all right. For instance, in that group we spoke about, Elizabeth Elkus told me she didn't want to write. Then she came with a whole sheaf of poems. I rang her up that evening and I said, "I was so glad you brought your poems because everybody enjoyed them." If you stress the positive aspect of the poem, and never touch on any negative, people grow in their criteria. They don't grow if you hand them down specifics, if you say, "You should do this," or "you should not do that." That's at least my approach.

Riess: A group of people looking at art, or at photography, would go around the room and they would walk past ten things, and would stop dead in front of the eleventh because it's beautiful.

Arnstein: Yes, but you see, they were acting on their own criteria then.

Riess: Wouldn't that also happen with the poetry reading? For instance, Anne's things. Would she read them and everyone would be startled and moved?

Arnstein: No, they hadn't any criteria at that time. They were just all groping toward it. Anne's poems would be read just as the others, and if I didn't say they were especially good, nobody would pay any more attention to hers than to the other's.

Riess: So it really takes a good deal of development? It sounds like it takes more development than the visual arts.

Arnstein: Oh yes, much more. There is no hurrying growth. Growth takes place at its own rate, and this happens to children and adults. It happened to me.

Riess: We're much more in touch with our visual ability than we are with the aural.

Arnstein: That's why I read their poems aloud. I don't allow them to read them because the writers don't know how to give emphasis to the good things. They read it all in, let's say, a monotone. I'd read it.

The Aural Side

Arnstein: Incidentally, I took a course with Dr. Moses. Do you know who he was? He was a psychiatrist and a throat specialist. I was doing a program for children over the radio. I called it "Pony Pegasus." I was inviting them to write and send in their poems. I had a playback on my record, and I noticed that my voice was very poor, and I thought maybe Dr. Moses could help me improve it.

I went to him, but we were so interested in the subject of poetry and voice that we did nothing but talk. He gave me only one suggestion, and the rest of the time--I thought he should have paid me as well as I was paying him. What he told me was interesting. I was reading a poem in which the word "tree" occurred. He said, "A tree is something tall, so when you come to the word tree, your voice must rise." That's the one thing I learned from him. [laughs]

Riess: [laughs] That's fine. You didn't have any more encounters with him?

Arnstein: I had several with him, yes, for a long time, but they were all just discussions. He was employed by the opera company, and by singers who whenever they had trouble with their throats consulted him. He treated them either by spraying their throat or helping them to handle their voices.

Riess: Is it necessarily so that the poet is a good oral interpreter of his works?

Arnstein: Not necessarily. Some of them read very badly, looking down, and dropping the voices at the end of the poem, so you don't hear the lines which are so important. No, they don't read too well, some of them.

Riess: Which do you remember as the most effective readers of the group?

Arnstein: James Schevill --I don't know, I think he dropped his voice, too, at the end. I don't really remember.

Riess: Allen Ginsberg?

Arnstein: I don't remember hearing him. I heard him later when he came here with his father. His father read his own poems which were in the old style, and he [Allen] read his which were more or less modern.

Riess: Robert Duncan?

Arnstein: I wasn't very friendly to Robert Duncan because he came to my first reading down at the Telegraph Hill Settlement house and he walked out on me in the middle of it. [laughs] So, I never felt very friendly to him.

Riess: Oh dear, was he known to be a kind of cranky guy anyway?

Arnstein: I don't think so. He got to be very popular, and I never knew why, I don't like his things at all. Maybe I'm just prejudiced. [laughs]

Riess: How about the women who came to read for the Poetry Center, like Denise Levertov?

Arnstein: I don't remember hearing her. My sister-in-law did a painting of her, and she read there at her home, but I don't know whether I ever met her or talked to her.

#### Poetry Society of America

Riess: You, I think, said something about the Poetry Society of America.

Arnstein: Yes, I belong to that.

Riess: They meet out here?

Arnstein: No, they don't, only in New York. I was in New York at one time, and went to their, I think, fiftieth anniversary dinner. (I have that all in one of my books which will eventually go to the library.) It was a marvelous program, and every prominent poet was present, Robert Frost, Marianne Moore, Allen Tate.

At that time the Poetry Society was run so that any member was allowed to send in two poems every month. They received as many as several thousand poems, and then two or three poets read them and selected some for discussion in the group meetings where they were voted on. Some got first prizes, some got second, some didn't get any prize. I got several prizes. First prize, second prize, at different times.

Riess: Really? Tell me more about how all that worked.

Arnstein: One poet was a man named Alfred Dorn--he's written a lot of good things. He told me he was on one of the discussion groups when they were deciding on the poems, and he selected one of

Arnstein: my poems which he thought was better than any of the others, but he was voted down. He wrote me a charming letter saying he wanted to tell me how much he valued that poem, which was very nice of him.

That's the way it was run at that time. At present, instead of that form, you get a monthly bulletin of poems. I don't think they're very good, myself, but I don't know whether I'm out of touch with poems today or what.

Riess: Is it an amateur society?

Arnstein: No, it's professional.

Riess: I couldn't just send off a few little things that I had thrown together?

Arnstein: Oh no, you have to join the society.

Riess: What are the criteria for membership?

Arnstein: I don't know what their criteria are, but I know you have to now pay, I think, twenty-five dollars to enter.

Riess: But you have to have been a published poet?

Arnstein: I don't really know.

Riess: Were poems submitted anonymously?

Arnstein: You submitted them anonymously, typewritten, and you wrote your name on a card in a small envelope attached to it. After they had decided on the poems, they opened the small envelope. No prize was given on the basis of your popularity, or your publications.

Riess: Do you think it counts if a person does only one great poem?

Arnstein: I don't understand the question.

Riess: What if someone sent in a poem, and it was just one knockout poem, and took the first prize, but it was their first and last poem. Do you think that poetry has to be part of a lifetime body of work?

Arnstein: I don't think there are any "has to's."



Edith Jenkins; Poetic Genes

Riess: When did your daughter Edith start writing poetry?

Arnstein: She wrote when she was a little girl, extremely well, but in the forms of those days. She was very adept at writing sonnets and formal verses. She and a few of her friends met with me to read and write poetry. Then she didn't write for years and years, and felt very, very frustrated, but she was married, bringing up four children, was getting her master's degree at State, and she was running a household. How could she write? For many years she was frustrated, and then she taught over at the university there [Merritt College, Oakland]. It's just since she's retired that she's begun writing again. You've seen her things?

Riess: No.

Arnstein: You haven't? Whom did I give them to the other day? If I get them back, I'll give them to you.

Riess: Has she been published?

Arnstein: Yes, a lot, and she's been asked to read over and over again. She's really having a very fine reception. Then she had an extraordinary experience. I think it was Harcourt Brace that sent an editor here, who said they would like to publish one of the prose pieces that was published in the Massachusetts Review, and they would like to publish a number of her things. But, he said, there are not enough to make a book, and the publisher would like her to write an autobiography because most people like to have a consecutive story.

She tried an autobiography, and she wrote the publisher, "I'm sorry, I can't take you up on this because I can't write that way." They sent a man out here again! Now, that's unheard of from a publisher. He said, after talking with her, "Do it your own way." There's no guarantee it will be published, but at least he gave her permission to write as she liked.

In the meantime, she's sending her things out to other publishers, which you're entitled to do provided you say, "I'm sending this out to other publishers." Otherwise, it's unethical to do so.

Riess: They want to do a whole book?

Arnstein: On her things, yes.

Riess: Since when does a poet include an autobiography?

Arnstein: I don't know, that was their idea.

Riess: How do you account for all of this poetic genius in the family? Do you think that it's your teaching, or do you think it's genetic?

Arnstein: Oh no, I think it's genetic. It comes from somewhere, I don't know where. My grandfather used to write poems, occasional poems for my grandmother's birthday. They were sentimental and trite. They always embarrassed me, when I was a little girl, until I thought they sounded like Heine, and then I accepted them. [laughs]

Riess: Did he write them in German or in English?

Arnstein: German, but he translated poems from German to French and to English. There was one little French poem, "Un peu de gloire, et puis bonjour," "A little joy and then goodbye." I almost wept when he read that because I didn't want to think of him dying, ever, when I was a little girl.

He was a self-educated man, better educated than any of his sons, except the one who went to Harvard. He was the only one who wasn't in business.

Riess: Have any of the sons and grandsons been interested in poetry?

Arnstein: Oh yes, very much so. Eric, my oldest grandson, Ethel's son, writes extremely well. When I read him my things, he'll often find something that isn't good. He has been in a number of my classes and is a real adjunct because he's so poetically oriented. And Rachel is also a poet.

Riess: You often speak of Eric. He sounds remarkable.

Arnstein: He is, he's a remarkable man. He handles all my chaotic finances. [laughs] I said to him once--I was thanking him for doing so, and he said, "You don't think I come over here because I like to do arithmetic, do you?" "Why do you come?" "Look, I want to do something for you," he said. [laughs]

Riess: In all of the cases, Edith, Eric, you, do you think that the motivation is the same, the "poetry is therapy" kind of thing?

Arnstein: No, I don't think we write for therapy. I think writing is therapeutic, but I think it comes from impulse. Did I tell you my tentative definition of coincidence?

Riess: No.

Arnstein: This is tentative. You know the boxes children play with that have holes in them, and there are little balls that will fit only in certain holes. The child moves this box around until he gets the balls in the right holes.

Well, now this is how I define coincidence: time is flexible, it's past, present, and future. That's your box. All right, you have an experience, you see somebody on the street. Then let's say he calls you on the telephone. That's a coincidence. All right, your first hole in the box is that you see him on the street. The second hole is the time he calls you. Then, you turn your box around (the time box), and when the right ball falls into the right hole, that's your coincidence. [laughs]

It's all very tentative and rather silly, but nevertheless, I can't find any other explanation for coincidence. For instance, the other day, not so long ago--.

Riess: You're really making a rather sophisticated statement about relativity when you're saying that?

Arnstein: Davy, Edith's son, said to me, "Granny, everything is relative. Everything is going around you all the time. Sometimes you notice things, sometimes you don't."

What happened the other day was extraordinary. In the morning I wrote a poem to the effect that, "I don't know where poems come from/They must come from impulse." In the afternoon, I get a letter from Dr. Settlege including an article about a woman who started to write when she was sixty years old, and in it she writes, "The only way I can account for this is by impulse." Now, I ask you, how do you explain that?

Riess: I don't know.

Arnstein: I don't either.

Riess: It's very pleasing though, isn't it?

Arnstein: It's strange, and I'm running across this more and more the older I get. I can't explain it.

Riess: Did you join a group called Pen Women of America?

Arnstein: I don't belong to anything like that.

Poets in the Schools Project

Riess: Another project that I think you were involved in was poets in the schools.

Arnstein: For a little while. I didn't go on with that. I'll tell you how that happened. I was asked to join it from State College. They promoted it. I was sent once to a co-educational public school and that was the day that men landed on the moon, so who was interested in poetry? I ask you. Then, I thought, "One day is no earthly use. In order to have poetry mean anything at all, it has to be the result of a long process." At that time, nobody was writing poetry. Today everybody's writing, you don't have to set the stage at all, but in my day you did.

So I decided the school program was not for me. The woman who started it, I rang up one day and said, "I've been thinking a lot about that 'poetry in the school' project. I don't know if you'd be interested." She said, "Yes, I would." I said, "Come and see me, we'll talk it over."

I asked her, when she came, "Do you screen the people that go out to teach the children? Do you know whether they know how to teach?" "No," she said. "Do you screen them as to poetry, whether they write anything that's any good or not?" "No," she said. I said, "How on earth do you expect them to teach poetry to children, when they haven't any background?"

Then I went on to tell her what I objected to. One of the young people who had been teaching poetry in the schools at this summer session brought the children to a group of teachers. Five little boys sat on a platform and read their poems. One of the teachers asked a child, "What do you do if you write a bad poem?" He said, "I never write a bad poem." [laughs] I thought this was just exploitation, which I told her. She said, "I have to send a report to all those who attended the class, and can I send your criticism with the report?" I said, "No." She said, "Why not?" I said, "It isn't their fault, it's the program's fault, not the young people's." She said, "We'll change that."

A young man, who's now running a course for young people who go out to the schools, came to a reading I gave of the poems of children I taught. Among other things I said, "I never suggest a topic; the children should find topics from their own selves, from their own personal experiences. Only then are the poems valid." He said, "Every time you mentioned

Arnstein: a topic, I wrote it down. I thought, 'That would be good to give the children.' Then, you said you never gave topics to them." [laughs]

He sent me a book of poems his teachers received from the children and they were not good. They really were not authentic, were too much influenced by the teachers. The only person whose children did well was Shirley Kaufman. Her children did write good stuff.

Riess: Do you think that it takes a poet to teach writing poetry?

Arnstein: Well, at least it takes somebody who's sympathetic to poetry.

Riess: You have read and performed with the Poetry Center. Where else have you performed?

Arnstein: Where I've read? Oh, my gosh, I can't even tell you, all up and down the coast. After my first book came out, I spoke in Santa Rosa, in Berkeley, all over, in Garden City, Garden Grove, or whatever it's called, also in San Diego.

Riess: Would it always be to groups of teachers?

Arnstein: I think so, teachers in college, yes.

Riess: Did you enjoy doing that?

Arnstein: Yes, I did.

Riess: Did you try to do a model session?

Arnstein: No, I don't believe in methods or models. I just read the children's poems and discussed them, and how I approached teaching. I always stressed the fact that people should act from their own centers. I said, "Don't accept anything I'm telling you. I'm telling you what worked for me. What works for you may not be the same thing at all. Work from your own center."

Riess: You came from such a mature center when you started writing poetry.

Arnstein: I was forty, so I was fairly--if you call that mature. [laughs] You can be immature at forty, too, and I was in many ways. [laughs]



Avoiding the Sentimental

Riess: Do you think you'd recognize the age of a person from their poetry?

Arnstein: No. A child who writes, "I met death one clumsy day." How in the world can you think of that coming from an eleven-year-old child?

Riess: "Clumsy" is such an adult word.

Arnstein: That's it, that's the amazing thing, the way these words come to children. I have a great-granddaughter who is the daughter of my dancing granddaughter, Margaret Jenkins. The other day she refused to get dressed and her mother said to her, "All right, if you don't dress yourself, I'll have to dress you." The child replied, "It's obvious you haven't taken any mothering lessons." Now, where does a child get that "obvious," and "mothering lessons," from? Tell me. [laughs]

Riess: That's great, when a child can turn around and make a statement that is on a par with the adult, because children are whole people.

Arnstein: That's right. We usually treat them as second-hand citizens.

Riess: You studied poetry at Mills College with Lionel Stevenson?

Arnstein: Yes, I took a course with him. I don't think I learned very much from him. He said I should write a narrative poem, and I didn't know what to write about. I went to Reuben Rinder, who was the cantor at Temple Emanu El. He gave me a subject: "The marriage of an angel with a mortal." I wrote that, but as far as I was concerned, it was just contrived. I didn't feel that I got anywhere with it. I have letters from Lionel Stevenson in my file, too.

Riess: Do you take classes to push you to do more writing?

Arnstein: To stimulate me? No, I really wanted them for getting criteria on my own work. People would say to me, "This need working," and I wouldn't know what they meant. "What do you mean it 'needs working'?" Nobody could tell me.

Riess: Ultimately, did you learn what it meant?

Arnstein: [laughs] In recent years. I told you I've been destroying poem after poem after poem, and story after story after story that I've written in the last few years. Suddenly I realize, "My God, how could I write that way!"

Riess: Couldn't it all just be worked on?

Arnstein: Reworked? Oh no, it's not worth reworking. Some of it was sentimental, and I'm not a sentimental person. Some was trivial, and I don't think I'm interested in trivia.

Riess: I'd like a definition of "sentimental."

Arnstein: Sentimental is false emotion, an emotion that is not genuine. People are sentimental about children, "Oh, the dear little things." That's not genuine. You respect children, you don't say, "Dear little things."

Riess: They are sort of universal sentiments?

Arnstein: Oh yes, there's too much of it around. It pre-empts all real feeling. [laughs]

Riess: So it's a danger?

Arnstein: I think so, very much so. Children aren't naturally sentimental.

I made a great mistake in my teaching once. One child, Art Hoppe actually, wrote a sentimental poem to the effect that his "dear old mother" had done this and that for him. Well, his "dear old mother" was a young woman, a lovely singer. The children were compiling the poems that had been written for the little year books and they chose that poem. I was horrified, and for the first time in my life I made a criticism. I said, "Your mother wasn't an old mother, she's young."

At that point, the children started to criticize every poem that had been submitted. I was surprised, and thought, "I've intruded and I've taken the children away from their own criteria." At the following session, one of the children said, "Please read those poems that we read last time because I think we all thought you wanted us to criticize them." I learned a good lesson from that.

I had also learned it from my own daughter. She hated practicing piano and I practiced with her. One day she played a piece and I said, "Oh, that was very nice." She looked at me critically and said, "It wasn't that good." I made up my mind never again to comment with the idea of encouraging children, for that was also false. You learn from children as much as they learn from you, more maybe.

Riess: It's tricky. I guess where most of us are acquainted with the dilemma is children and art, and the unstructured teaching of art.

Arnstein: They can hide behind their art work, it isn't overt. But if they write a poem, that's overt. They've said something, and they hide it, since they don't want to give that up of themselves. Art is impersonal. You don't deduce things about a person from it.

Riess: But the kind of random art splashings--when the teacher says, "Very nice, let's see some more," is that criteria or is that criticism?

Arnstein: I always believe in something neutral, such as, "I like that," or "That's nice," a comment that doesn't carry too much weight.

Riess: What if what you're looking at is not in the least bit nice?

Arnstein: You don't have to say it. You shouldn't do it for a reason.

## HINDSIGHTS

Reassessments

Arnstein: I had an interesting experience a couple of weeks ago. One of my old pupils came to see me. He didn't come of his own accord this time, though he had come once before. He came because I rang him up. I had found among my letters one from him in response to the article I'd written of growing old in the nineties. He wrote of similar experiences that he had had: in the streets, the organ-grinders with the monkeys, and the man who called out, "rags, bottles, sacks," and said he remembered all that. I phoned him to ask, "Would you like to have that letter? I'll send it to you." He said, "No, let me come and see you, and then we'll talk about it."

In my book he was Ed, "The Hampered Child," a youngster that the ordinary public school would never have brought out. [Dear Harriet, pp. 31-43] When he was a boy, he was very crude, very antagonistic to adults. He was intelligent, learned easily, had an excellent memory, but never participated in anything that was group discussions. One day a little girl was telling me she was mixed up about maps: "I never can tell where north and south are." I said, "North is always at the top of the page, and south is at the bottom." This Ed broke in and said, "Not always," and instead of going out to recess he went into the library and pored through atlases and geographies, and finally came back with a book which showed a map in which north and south were not at the top and bottom, but were at the sides. (This was before there were aerial photographs.)

I said, "Do you remember that? I took that as part of your antagonism to grownups." He said, "You misinterpreted me. I actually had seen a map like that. I came across one of the Ferry Building to Twin Peaks, and it showed north and south on the sides. That's what I had in mind."

Arnstein: One reason he prospered at our school was because it gave him the opportunity for working in a field which he liked, in the multigraph. He was the head of the printing. He'd always enjoyed working with his hands.

He went on to tell me he was divorced from his wife. He had adopted his wife's son by a previous marriage, and had had a daughter by her. They became divorced. He told me of a most delicate thing he had done for the two girls which were his wife's by an earlier husband. He sent Christmas checks every year. The checks were cashed and he never received acknowledgments from the girls, so he wrote them suggesting the Christmas checks might have gone astray and to let him know and he'd send them others. I said, "You're much nicer than I would have been." Here's this man with that kind of delicacy.

Then we were talking about people being late. I said that I always say, when people are late, "You evidently think your time is more valuable than mine." He said, "I never do that." He's a dentist now. He said when people are late for their appointments he explains to them, "When you're late for an appointment, every other person who comes to me that day has to wait fifteen minutes, and I have to stay fifteen minutes later than I usually do. So you see how you're affecting all those people's lives."

Imagine that crude boy turning around into this very charming, sensitive human being. It's amazing. You never can tell how kids will turn out, never. That's the burden of my book, Dear Harriet. Never make a final statement about any child.

Riess: Your statement about "Ed" in the book was incorrect, about his motivation.

Arnstein: It was incorrect, because I thought it was just part of his antagonism, but it wasn't. It was actually something that he had seen, and that had impressed him.

Riess: If you were to rewrite that chapter of Dear Harriet would you reassess that child completely?

Arnstein: I certainly would. I feel that I made a mistake. I caution myself at the end of the book not to make snap judgments.

Dr. Settlage asked me to write a commentary at the end of the book because, "You and I understand how children act, but a lot of people don't. I think you ought to explain." And I wrote that I should have acted differently on many things. I've



Arnstein: punished children only twice in seventeen years of teaching, and I should not have done that even then. Eric said to me, "People ought to know the results of their actions. That's what they're going to find in life." I said, "They shouldn't in the schoolroom." [laughs]

Riess: I guess it's always tricky to understand really what an action is.

Arnstein: That's exactly it. Whenever I had a new class, especially of older children, I would say, "I like to be fair, and I hope I will be fair with you, but sometimes the teacher doesn't know everything that goes on in a situation. If at any time you feel I'm unfair I want you to tell me, because I want to be fair."

One day, Art Hoppe and a niece of mine--did I tell you this already?

Riess: You haven't gotten far enough for me to know.

Arnstein: They were exchanging bottle tops. It was a craze of these little paper tops that used to come inside glass bottles. The fad went all over the country. Art Hoppe and my niece came into the class with their bottle tops in their hands. I said to them, "Now listen, you can swap before school, you can swap at recess, you can swap after school, you cannot swap in this room. We are here for another purpose."

Presently, they were swapping under their desks. I said, "You understood what I said before? If you do this again, I will take your bottle tops." One of the children said, "But you'll give them back?" I said, "No, I won't." Well, they presently began to swap again. I said, "All right, hand over your bottle tops." One of the girls stood up and said, "I don't think that's fair." I said, "Why not? I warned them." She said, "Because Art has only a few of his in his hand, and Edith has her whole pack. You're taking her whole pack, and you're only taking a few of his, and that doesn't seem fair." I said, "I think you're right. How do the rest of you think?" All the class said that they thought she was right. I said, "Edith, count out how many Art is giving, and you give the same number."

Well, in my last chapter of Dear Harriet I repudiated that act. I said I had been stupid. What I should have done when the children came into the room was to say, "Put your bottle tops up on the shelf." Then there wouldn't have been that temptation. I should have had foresight to prepare for what was happening.

Riess: I don't see how they thought they could get away with it three times, frankly. I think you were really being tested.

Arnstein: I don't know whether they were doing it to test me.

Commentary on Students

Riess: You kept up with Art Hoppe?

Arnstein: Art's had dinner with me and my husband once. Ursula Wolff also kept up with me; every Christmas I got a card from her, and my dentist pupil as well. Strangely enough, it's only the Jewish children that have kept in touch with me, except Art Hoppe. I don't know how that happens.

Riess: Do you have any guesses?

Arnstein: No.

Riess: Pierre Salinger?

Arnstein: Oh yes, Pierre. Well, Pierre was half Jewish. His father was Jewish, his mother not.

Riess: Do you see him?

Arnstein: I used to hear from him frequently. I have a letter from Herbert Lehman, the governor of New York, in which he'd had some occasion to approach Pierre, and Pierre had written him. Lehman said, "I've heard of you through my cousin, Mrs. Arnstein." Pierre wrote, "She's been a great influence in my life."

Riess: Who is Jerry Meadows?

Arnstein: Her name was Silverstone. She married a black man named Meadows, and she's still married to him. She writes me occasionally at Christmas. She's now a grandmother. I told her I couldn't believe it. I said, "Evidently you stayed with your husband." She said, "Sometimes we look at each other and ask ourselves why." [laughs]

Riess: Who is Leona Wolff?

Arnstein: Leona Wolff is a doctor, Leona Bayers before she married. She was the mother of the three Wolff children I taught, Ursula, Frankie, and Carla. She wrote me a beautiful letter. She

Arnstein: told me something Carla had once said. The school had an optional afternoon program once a week during which the children could go to shop, to art, or music, or poetry. They were required to stay in whichever group they chose, not to go from one room to another. Carla had said to her mother, "I won't go to art, I won't go to music, I won't go to shop, I won't even go to recess. I go to poetry. That's better than even recess." Dr. Wolff said, "Now you've had my three children, and that's Carla's version of you." [laughs]

Riess: That's nice. It's nice that the whole relationship worked out so well.

Arnstein: It did. Carla is now a psychiatrist and married to a Mexican. I had a black woman come to interview me on something, I don't know what now, but she had a child in what is still extant of the Presidio school, and Carla had her child there. I said, "Ask Carla to come and see me."

Riess: You told me that last week, yes, right. I was thinking that there's still that bitterness from Carla, but you apparently understand the mother very well.

Arnstein: Yes, sure.

Riess: Let me just have one more question's worth. Does your daughter Edith now criticize your writing for you?

Arnstein: Yes, sure. She's a very good critic, too. I'm overinclined to accept criticism. Sometimes I accept it and then after I get by myself I think, "No, I really don't think that. I really like it." She criticized a line in one of my poems the other day, saying, "You ought to omit that." I sent the poem to Shirley Kaufman, and she wrote back, "You ought to cut out that last line." Since the two of them thought so, I decided I'd better delete it. [laughs]

Riess: How has that kind of peer relationship developed?

Arnstein: With Edith and me?

Riess: Yes.

Arnstein: Very well since she ceased identifying with me. Then it was fine, because she writes entirely differently from me. We're very different people, though we're alike in many ways.

Riess: In writing the Vignettes, you've had Edith in mind as an audience?

Arnstein: No, except the ones about the dogs and the riding.

Riess: You've been reading about mothers and daughters. I wonder if the whole subject has intrigued you in a personal way?

Arnstein: Yes, it has. I think it's a very difficult relationship. It has to be worked out in every case, and I don't think there is any rule about it. Each person has to work it out the best he can. Sometimes it can't be worked out at all. For instance, Carla and her mother never came to any agreement.

Riess: Have you and Edith consciously worked out a relationship?

Arnstein: Absolutely. I find I don't agree with her on some matters and she doesn't agree with me in others. We agree to differ. So that's the story.

#### Creative Development

[Interview 8: March 6, 1985]

Arnstein: Here is a letter that I wrote to my sister-in-law, Mabel, just after I started writing, and I underlined this because I thought it was interesting: "It's an extraordinary thing, anyway you look at it"--my writing when I started--"when one never has written a line of verse, within two weeks to write sixty-eight poems." (I felt you would want to have that there.) "Anything can happen, it seems. I don't feel cocky. I take up any volume of poets and note their superiority. I do feel set up, but you surely understand that."

Riess: Where was Mabel [Salinger] at the time?

Arnstein: She was in New York.

Riess: The first night you wrote twelve, and then it continued, day after day?

Arnstein: Yes, day after day for a while, sixty-eight poems in two weeks.

Riess: When it's not flowing like that, do you panic?

Arnstein: No, the impulse always comes back.

So, that's all I have for you. What have you got for me?  
[tape off, followed by Riess question about Arnstein's students]

Arnstein: The other day someone rang me up and said, "This is Ted Jacobs." I didn't register that at all, and said, "Will you speak a little louder, I'm a little deaf." He said, "Ted Jacobs. Don't you remember me? I was in your eighth grade." I said, "Oh, you mean 'Teddy,'" which we used to call him. He's doing, I think, cancer research at U.C. Hospital. He said, "I would like to come to see you." I said, "I would love that." "I want to bring up my fiance," he said.

Riess: People like to come and see you, and be near you, I think.

Arnstein: Maybe the word has gotten around through Jim Schwabacher. I think he wrote to all the pupils at the school where I had taught, about the oral history, and maybe that recalled me to him.

Riess: From your point of view, in your nineties, do you find people of certain ages, much younger people, really aren't very interesting?

Arnstein: There is no prognosis of what people are going to be. I told you about the boy of whom I wrote three chapters in Dear Harriet, the one who handled the multigraph, Ed.

Riess: Yes, but I'm thinking that for me I don't think people in their twenties are terribly interesting. I like people closer to my age.

Arnstein: It just depends. I'm not too conscious of age at any time, as I told you.

Riess: Don't you think many people develop slowly?

Arnstein: They do. Edith's children were very late bloomers, as I've told you. I wouldn't have prognosticated that Margy was going to be such an important dancer. I don't think you can tell anything about people. There are so many factors involved.

I was talking the other day to my grandson Eric about the woman who heads our discussion group. She's a sociologist, and is always reducing things to numbers.

I said to Dr. Settlage, "Everything gets lost between numbers," and he demurred. "Sometimes you need numbers." I said, "When?" He said, "Supposing I come across a certain characteristic in ten of my patients. That's too few to draw any conclusions from, but if twenty psychiatrists find the same characteristic as I, then you can draw a conclusion."



Arnstein: Eric said to me, "No, Granny, you cannot. You can draw a probability from that, but you don't know other influences that might have gone into it." Which is true.

Riess: Dr. Settlage would probably agree with that, too.

Arnstein: Yes, I think he would. He's very flexible.

Riess: It's a great quality.

Arnstein: Yes, well, the whole Jenkins family is socially-minded. Two are practicing psychiatry, and Davy's working for gun control. He came to see me on Sunday. He's going east to talk with police chiefs from all over the United States to inform them about how to present the gun menace to various people. Also how to break down the barrier between the police and the public by explaining to the latter what the dangers are inherent in gun buying and ownership.

He's written, together with some other people, an interesting booklet on gun control, explaining the dangers of having guns in the home, as well as in buying them. Guns in the home brings up the question of: Are you willing to shoot a person if he comes at you? You have to decide that. Are you quick enough to get your gun out? Are you a menace to intruders, so they shoot you? You see, the whole question is very important.

Riess: Have you ever been in any of what we would call now "consciousness-raising" groups?

Arnstein: No, I don't know what that is even.

Riess: Well, you have been in poetry-writing groups, and reading groups, and this and that. The consciousness-raising groups were in the sixties, women wishing to consider their own status, as women.

Arnstein: No, I don't know anything about that.

### The Elderly Group

Riess: The group that you are in with Marge Lozoff, isn't that a kind of "consciousness-raising" about the issue of aging?

Arnstein: The issue was originally of aging and how to approach it, but now we take up different subjects. I bring in poems that are controverisal, throw them on the table, and I say, "Do what you want with this. Let's discuss it, and pull it to pieces." We're not limited to just aging.

Riess: You're still putting your poetry out there to be pulled to pieces?

Arnstein: Yes. For instance, the other day when the group was here--the group came here because I can't go out--one of the members said, "Haven't you got a poem to read to us?" I hadn't anything prepared, but I took out a book and happened to turn to a poem on the garden. The garden has been a recurring image in all my poems over the years, but in this poem I said something to this effect--I can't quote it literally--"To fence in, is to fence out." I had always fenced in, but looking back now, I find I was fencing out very important things. Today I would open my gates to children riding bicycles over my lawn, trucks driving into my hedge, because I value now the outside world, rather than just my own personal concerns. The poem initiated much discussion. To what degree does one open oneself, and to what degree does one withhold oneself?

Riess: It's a particularly good discussion for aging.

Arnstein: It represents, if you don't want to call it growth, a sort of change of attitude toward the outside world as against a too egoistic one.

Riess: Was that an issue that had just welled up in that poem, or had you been thinking about the inside-outside?

Arnstein: I don't know; my poems just come, I don't know where from.

Riess: Do you recognize this question of fencing in or fencing out as something that's new for you? You would strike me as someone who had been welcoming intrusion in your life.

Arnstein: I don't know to what extent; maybe only superficially before, and this was a more profound realization maybe. I can't analyze my own poems. On re-reading a poem, if I try to explain a possible symbol, I am so doubtful about the explanation I write, that I put a question mark after it.

Riess: Is your current group the same age and same sex?

Arnstein: No, we have several men in the group. Three men. One of them comes but only occasionally. He was introduced by Dr. Mary Jones, whom you know from the university, and his wife heads the whole program that Mary Jones is involved in. He, himself (I was told this by a friend in the group) is an intellectual, has had PhD's in psychiatry, in religion, et cetera. He says he's not a Christian, but he's a kind of lay minister. He works with people in hospitals.

Arnstein: Then there's another man who has been very, very ill and has been consulting many doctors. To my great interest and surprise, and happiness really, the other day when he came to the meeting he said, "I've decided to forget about the doctors, I'm still here." I thought, "My gosh, that's fine, he's forward-looking now."

Another man is a businessman, an instructor of salesmen. He's very conventional and brings a, what shall I say, a mundane note to the group. I don't find him very interesting.

Riess: Does that bring the group down in some ways?

Arnstein: No, I don't think anybody has too much of an influence on the group, except they tell me I have. They tell me if I leave the group will fall apart. [laughs] I do bring up controversial subjects, which other people don't, and these get discussions going, of course.

Riess: Do you think that the group would go a lot deeper if it didn't have any of the men?

Arnstein: No, I don't think so. I think we welcome different points of view. In fact, the leader of the group brings in young people of various disciplines to talk to us and there is always something to be gained from that.

Riess: There is a leader?

Arnstein: Marge Lozoff establishes herself as the leader.  
She is extremely intelligent and is very sensitive at times.

Riess: What are the names of the other people in the group?

Arnstein: Mrs. Ruth Witt Diamont, whom you know, you have all her files over at The Bancroft Library. I don't know the name of that man who comes from up north; they call him "Ike," but I don't know what his last name is. Let's see who else. There's Betty Reiss, who is a student writing her degree and she's in this group to get materials on aging. There's Mrs. Rosenblum, a woman who I've made a friend of, who does a lot of volunteer work at different institutions and at Filoli. I can't think of anybody else.

Marge Lozoff referred the other day to "my group." Mrs. Rosenblum said, "Listen, it isn't your group, it's a group." I had asked her once, "How did you get this group together?" She said, "I didn't, they just came." In my case, Edith told me she had heard through a friend of hers, a psychologist, that there was a group of elderly people meeting for discussions. I said to Edith, "Not me, I don't want to associate with elderly people, I want to be with young people." She said, "Mother, don't be so stubborn. Go down once and if you don't like it, don't go again." [laughs]

So I went, and after the session said, "I'm not a joiner, I've never joined anything, but if you'll have me, I'd like to join this group." I found it a very interesting and stimulating group. The man who had been a businessman, he had heard of it through an item in a newspaper. I think he read about a group being formed and he was interested, too, in aging. He works with the group studying aging at State College and at the University of California. He's not old himself, though.

Riess: I asked you in the beginning whether you thought that there were some ages that were more interesting than others. Now you've just said to me you don't like elderly people. [laughs]

Arnstein: No, I didn't say, "I don't like elderly people." I said, "I don't want to associate with elderly people." I don't want people who have given up, in other words.

Riess: But that's a kind of definition that isn't necessarily true.

Arnstein: No, everybody hasn't given up, as is shown by this group, but by and large elderly people are put on the shelf. I mean, our social attitude toward aging has to be changed, and is changing now. Formerly people put their parents in a nursing home or somewhere, just to get rid of them.

Riess: You said that originally the topic of the group was aging?

Arnstein: There is now no specific topic. Marge Lozoff had an agenda at first, and I said I thought that the value of the group lay in the fact that we were spontaneous, and did not have an agenda. She said, "Couldn't I ask somebody to speak on some subject each time?" I said, "That's the same thing. It's restrictive."

Now she canvasses each member of the group and asks, "Has anything happened to you of interest this week?" People are more spontaneous, and it's more interesting that way.

Riess: What are some of the things that have come up that you can think of?

Arnstein: Well, Dr. Jones is writing an oral history of her husband, and she's rather troubled by some things about that.\* Other people have difficulties in housing problems, and some people have difficulty in relation to their children. Various things come up, but they're usually restricted to matters that are of interest to the general group.\*\*

#### The Extended Family of Mrs. Arnstein

Riess: Earlier in life, were you involved with child welfare institutions? We have an interview with Amy Steinhart Braden.

Arnstein: She was a friend of mine. But no, I was just interested in education, and, of course, welfare is part of the educational process as far as I'm concerned. The child must prosper for the education to be successful, I think. You might call that "welfare," I don't know. [laughs]

Riess: In your extended family of cousins, second and third cousins, has there been a kind of consistent interest in social welfare and child welfare?

Arnstein: Oh yes, in my husband's family. Helen Salz's husband was, and Margaret, her youngest daughter in Santa Cruz. They're all interested in social concerns, and Helen herself, of course, was involved.

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\*Mary Cover Jones, Harold E. Jones and Mary C. Jones, Partners in Longitudinal Studies, an interview conducted 1981, 1982 by the Regional Oral History Office of The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 1983, 154 p.

\*\*The group is called The Group for Enriched Living.



Riess: When I say "your extended family," do you keep up with all of the intricacies of the Brandenstein clan?

Arnstein: No, because there was a big gap in ages. My grandmother had eleven children, but I was only in touch with the younger members. The older members, well, I don't know, they were my aunts and uncles. Some of them I've kept in touch with, some of them I haven't.

Riess: When you were younger, did you have any older women who were mentors for you? For instance, you would maybe have tea with Harriet Levy. [see p. 90]

Arnstein: I was much older then, I was married. No, in the earlier time I didn't have any mentors. I had a crush on Miss Peixotto, but she was not a mentor.

Riess: In your book you introduce your family, but I was interested in whether there was a continuing attempt at various holidays to keep all of that family together.

Arnstein: No, I don't remember that. Only my grandparents came to us at Christmas. We never celebrated the Jewish holidays; my grandparents did, but we didn't. My father was an agnostic. Neither he nor my mother belonged to a temple, and I never had any religious training.

Riess: I wasn't necessarily thinking of religious holidays. Summer vacations, a big house where you would all be, or something like that.

Arnstein: No. We kept in touch with the family of one I've called "Tottie" in my little book. "Tottie" and I were very close friends. I said, "Like a cup and saucer, we were always together."

Riess: Who are the people that you would say you've been closest to in your life?

Arnstein: My sister-in-law, Gertrude, who died when her youngest son was born. She was my very close friend. Of course, the principal of the school was my closest friend, Marion Turner. Who were my other friends? Well, with lesser degree of intimacy, Albert Elkus and in later years, Elizabeth Elkus. Let's see, I can't remember now.

Free Love

Riess: How did you and Albert Elkus come to know each other?

Arnstein: We were in the same small Jewish enclave who met at parties. He and I became friends. When I was young, my two sisters-in-law and I used to be intrigued by him because he had what was for us very advanced ideas. He believed in free love.

Very much later in my life, after I was married, I took some music lessons with him for a short time. Later he said to me, "Why did you quit with me?" I said, "Because you stopped me so often when I was playing, you never let me finish anything. You got me so self-conscious I felt I couldn't play at all." He said, "Why didn't you tell me?" I said, "It wasn't my job to tell you how to teach." [laughs]

Riess: Where did he get his free love ideas?

Arnstein: He lived with a lot of different women, here in the city, and somebody in the east. It was funny because in some ways he was quite innocent. Like everybody else he was a compound of various factors. We were friends up to when he died.

I'm very devoted to his wife Elizabeth today. She's a very unusual woman, very "down-to-earth." She's psychologically oriented without being rigid. She is very much of a humanitarian and especially interested in children. We have a lot in common. She belonged to my poetry class for many years.

Riess: The idea of free love, we're talking about 1910?

Arnstein: No, I was married then, in 1910. It was long before that, but there was a judge who advocated "trial marriages," which amounted to free love. He felt that people didn't really know each other when they got married. I agreed with him; I mean intellectually I agreed with that. Whether I actually would have espoused it, I doubt. [laughs] I was much too conventional.

Riess: He was a judge?

Arnstein: He was a national judge somewhere, I don't know where.

Riess: He wasn't from San Francisco?

Arnstein: No, I don't think so.

Dame Myra Hess

Riess: When Myra Hess was out here, did you always see her?

Arnstein: I put myself at her disposal when she came. I said, "I'm your driver as long as you're in San Francisco."

Riess: Did she come out annually?

Arnstein: No, not annually, but whenever she did come. I drove her to Chinatown one time, and down to the Steinway warehouse where she was going to choose a piano, and back to the symphony hall where she tried it out. [Vignettes, pp. 66-73]

Riess: Did she stay at your house here?

Arnstein: Oh no, she stayed at the Palace Hotel.

Riess: Did you bring a group of musical people to meet her when she was here?

Arnstein: No, she wanted just to be in a family group. She had a marvelous sense of humor. She told many funny things that had happened in the musical world. She had a kind of English humor which I like very much.

Riess: Did you start out being in awe of her?

Arnstein: No. She immediately established a relationship. Albert had taken her walking up Mt. Tamalpais one day and she came to us that evening. No, it was very informal.

Dr. Settlege and the Latest Book

Riess: Have you ever been in awe of anyone?

Arnstein: Oh yes, lots of people. In fact, I tend to be in awe of people who are accomplished in any field.

Riess: The question is, do you stick around and find out whether they're human.

Arnstein: With Dr. Settlege I was in awe of him because of his background and wide knowledge. But I stuck around, if you call it that.  
[laughs]

Riess: That's a different kind of knowledge, when you think that someone can see into your inner workings.

Arnstein: That wasn't the knowledge that I was interested in. I was interested in his vast experience.

Riess: That relationship began when your husband died?

Arnstein: No, when my husband was still alive. In fact, I asked him once if he wouldn't like to meet Dr. Settlege, but he said, "No," he wouldn't. At that time, it was hard for him to make adaptations to new people. He was not really himself then. But I was meeting the doctor, who was coming here to lunch with me for some, I don't know, six or more years.

Riess: How did that start? Did you go to him as a patient?

Arnstein: No. You know who Caroline Voorsanger is?

Riess: Yes.

Arnstein: Caroline said to me, "There's a man you've got to meet." I said, "Why?" She said, "I'll tell you. To begin with, he's interested in aging, which you are." (I had written an article on gerontology.)\* "He's tremendously interested in poetry, and he's interested in creativity, and in child development. All of these things you have in common, and I'm going to take you to see him."

When she took me to his office I said, "I don't know how she's introduced me to you, maybe as a specimen." [laughs] He said, "Oh no! Not a specimen." Anyway, we got interested in talking, as we had all these subjects in common. He was doing research on children aged two. He said there had been research on age one and later ages, but very little on two. He was especially interested in my poetry. In fact, something has happened this week that has disturbed me. I got a letter from him yesterday--. We're working on this book, you know. Do you know?

Riess: I don't know enough about this book. I want you to talk about that.

Arnstein: Oh yes, well, I'll tell you. I had compiled a book of poems of my own, without any hope of its publication because there is no hope for publication of poetry unless you pay for it, and I don't want to do that. Since he was interested in poetry, I gave him my book to read. He said, "I've got an idea. I don't know whether it will appeal to you at all, and if it doesn't,

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\* See Appendix M.

Arnstein: just discard it. I would like to write a commentary with you on your book." I said, "What sort of commentary?" He said, "I don't know anything about the technique of poetry so I will never touch on that. But your poems speak to me personally, and I would like to put my reaction to your poems in an article."

Then he wrote an extraordinarily interesting outline, which I told him I felt was as creative as my poems. He subdivided the book into sections and each would deal with one of his interests. For instance, in creativity, in aging, in life, in what he called my "philosophy of life," which I don't acknowledge as being so fancy. Anyway, he wanted each section to contain poems illustrating his thesis.

But he wrote to me yesterday a letter in which he said--. I did consult him for psychiatric help after my husband died. I was very disoriented then. I've told you about this, haven't I?

Riess: No.

Arnstein: I was very disoriented. My house had been full of nurses for the three years when he was so sick, day nurses, night nurses, and I just felt my house wasn't my own. They were in and out of my kitchen, and suddenly after his death there was nobody here. I felt I was high and dry. Not only that, I was no more the most important person in somebody's life. I had lost my sense of self. "Who was I anyway?" I suddenly thought maybe Dr. Settlage could help me, though I didn't know if he was taking adults, I thought he was only treating children.

I wrote to him. "Would he be willing to see me as a patient?" He replied, "Yes." I made an appointment with his secretary. When I went to him I said, "I want you to understand, Dr. Settlage, that this is not a social visit. I'm coming to you as a patient, and I want to pay." He said, "We'll discuss this next time." I hadn't expected a "next time," but since he thought there was to be one, I agreed. The next time I said the same thing to him, and he repeated, "We'll discuss this next time."

The third time I said, "Now, Dr. Settlage, don't put me off any longer. I want to have you acknowledge that these are professional visits." He said, "I'm very much embarrassed." I said, "Why?" He said, "First of all, you were a friend before you were a patient, and second, I don't know how you're fixed financially." This was very sensitive on his part. I said, "I'm perfectly able to meet this financially, and I don't see that the fact that we were friends should come into the picture at all."



Arnstein: After I'd been to him, I had an impulse to write an article about what had happened, because I had been writing poems during those times which reflected my relation to him as a psychiatrist. I sent him this article with all my other papers, but with no intention of having it included in the book because it was much too personal. And what did he do but try to rewrite this article, to include in the book. "Yet," he said, "I don't think that it should be there. It is much too personal." Well, I hadn't intended it to be in the book, and I felt sorry that he'd taken all that time to rewrite it when he should have been taking time to do the other writing. [laughs] I'm going to tell him this when he comes tomorrow.

Riess: It sounds like, between the two of you, you have a lot of insights.

Arnstein: He said to me, "I don't consider you ever in psychiatric terms when we associate socially." When he came to lunch or social visits, I always tried to have something prepared that was easy so that I didn't need to leave him too long. Once when I left him I gave him a story of mine to read. It was written from a man's point of view. When he came in to lunch he said, "Do you always write as a man?" I said, "Oh no, I write as a woman, and as a child."

After he left I thought, "That was a funny kind of a question." So next time he came I said, "You know, you're very cryptic sometimes." "What do you mean?", he said. I said, "I was wondering why you asked me the question whether I always wrote as a man."

He said, "I asked you because I could never write as a woman. What did you think I meant?" [laughs] I said, "I thought you concluded that I had some sexual aberration." He said, "It never entered my head."

Riess: The book, you expect it will be published?

Arnstein: He went east because he's having some scientific book published. He consulted the publisher about his project of collaboration with me. The publisher told him, "We're taking a new stance. We're publishing some rather far-out books, books on poetry and such." Dr. Settlage said, "That's interesting, because I'm just in the process of writing a book with a poet." The publisher said, "If you let me see your outline, see what your approach is, and see her poems, I might be interested. Send it to me." Then, he added, "There are a number of other publishers that are doing far-out stuff now, and I could hand it on, if I don't want to take it myself."

Arnstein: Dr. Settlege sent on his outline, which I was very glad about, though he's never done any of the writing other than this outline. The reception by the publisher at least gave us a little hope, because as far as I could see, there had been no hope of the publication otherwise.

Riess: You haven't seen the kind of thing that he is writing?

Arnstein: He hasn't written it yet.

Riess: Do you think it's going to be interpretative?

Arnstein: It's going to be a personal reaction. He said, "Your poems speak to me."

Ruth Diamant said to me when I brought some of those poems to the group, "How do you know everything I'm thinking?" I said, "I don't know everything you're thinking, but I think unless a poem has something more than a personal appeal, unless it has some kind of universality, it hasn't much validity."

That's what he's thinking about, the universality. He keeps saying to me, "This will be important to other people, as it was to this woman."

Riess: I'm sure you'll be eager to see what his writing will be.

Arnstein: I'm terribly interested, and I myself would like to write some commentary on some of my poems.

### Analysis, of Poetry and People

Arnstein: I've told you about the recurrent similies, like the fish and the bird which occur all the time through my writing. I have written already articles, but just off the cuff, not good. In fact, I phoned him the other day to please bring them back to me because I want to work over them and include the poems as I go along. I think they represent, if not growth, then a changing point of view.

Riess: That's very interesting. What are the images?

Arnstein: The fish and the bird, these are two I've chosen to write about, but there are a lot more. There's the garden, which I told you about, "Shut in, shut out," but all the images recurr over and over again, either as complete poems or as metaphors.

Arnstein: The birds, I think, represent to me the symbol of striving, a striving towards something which a bird has naturally, but which a human being has not, a certain growth or rising or what have you.

Fishes represent the going into depths. In the New Testament, Jesus makes his disciples fishers of souls. In other words, you're looking for your soul.

Riess: You could do research into the archetypal meaning of those images. Have you gotten out any books on symbology?

Arnstein: No, and I'm not really interested in that because, as I say, there's a big question mark next to it, whether its symbolism is valid or not. It's valid for me, but whether for anybody else, I don't know.

Riess: It depends on whether you subscribe to some of the ideas of Jung, who would say that it definitely is valid.

Arnstein: Yes, well, I do subscribe to some ideas of Jung, and some ideas of Freud, too, the concept of the unconscious. Except in Freudian therapy I have always questioned the use of the couch. I had always a feeling that a person was abandoning his autonomy when he lay on a couch. The analyst sat behind him taking notes, and I thought the person on the couch would be unconsciously offering him what he wanted. It wasn't really his real self. I've talked to a lot of people who have gone through analysis, and they say that this isn't so, that you lose complete awareness of the analyst, and you just bring up associative materials as they come to you.

I repressed this idea of "couch" to such an extent that when I went down to Dr. Settlage's office those three times I never noticed there was a couch in his room. I even asked him, "Are you a Jungian, or a Freudian?" He said, "Basically, I'm Freudian with some reservations." I said, "I've never noticed your couch!" [laughs] I repressed that.

Riess: It sounds like a really splendid relationship. Do you consider him to be one of your good friends at this point?

Arnstein: A rather remote kind of friendship. He knows all about me, and I don't know very much about him. One day I told him this and he said to me, "What do you want to know about me?"

I said, "Anything you want to tell me." He told me a few things, but I don't think I really know him as he knows me because he's got everything I've written.

Riess: He probably thinks you know more than you know.

Arnstein: I think so.

Riess: It's interesting to me that he has all of these plans for writing, and that he hasn't written anything, and yet you view it as a collaboration.

Arnstein: It was very strange. We've had a lot of correspondence, which I've given him. He wants to put some of that in the book because he feels that that is significant, because I enclose poems that have reference to things we've been talking about.

I don't know how it came about, but we have always called each other by our first names in corresponding--he calls me Forgie, and I call him Cal--yet we've never done that vocally. One day it occurred to me, thinking that I never understood how we could collaborate, I just didn't know on what basis we could collaborate, to say, "I think there's something that is standing in the way of our collaboration, and that is that we cannot call each other verbally by our first names." I asked him about this, "I think this is standing in our way." He said, "You know, I've thought of that, but I pushed it aside." I said, "I think we ought to get over it, and it's going to be hard because I hold you in great awe, and you hold me as an exemplar of creativity which you tell me you have lost. You say you only write scientific works, and you always feel regretful that you've lost your creativity." I said, "We've both been blocked on those scores, but I think we have to get over it." So when he left that day I said, "Good-bye, Cal," and he said, "Good-bye, Forgie."

Then I wrote him I felt very much relieved after having done this. I felt we'd gotten not on an equal basis, because I didn't think we ever could do that, he being so erudite, but we'd gotten on an even basis, in that I was at home in my field, and he was at home in his. Do you see what I'm getting at?

Riess: Yes, but he may not feel that.

Arnstein: Yes, he did. He accepted that. It's been an interesting experience.

Riess: I'm sure he's getting a good deal out of it.

Arnstein: He says he is. In fact he wrote me--I should have brought down that letter--that he felt before he could do any writing in these various fields he had to immerse himself in my poems again. He had been doing so and was just as much impressed as he had been originally. I think he's on his way to writing.



Riess: Are there things about which you're still trying to write?

Arnstein: I never "try" to write.

Riess: Maybe there are subjects you want to write about, that you haven't succeeded in tackling?

Arnstein: No, there aren't things I want to write about.

Riess: The little manifesto that I read by you about why you are not interested in politics, why you are not a joiner, and why you don't like parties, do you think of these things as undeveloped parts of yourself?

Arnstein: They may be, maybe a neurotic side of myself. [laughs] They don't worry me anymore. I guess I've got to the place where I accept myself. I wrote a poem, one of my first--I don't even know if I'd read any Freud then--which represented the two sides of my self, "A Duel With a Devil." I have it here, do you want me to read it?

Riess: Yes.

Arnstein: It's in my first book. [A Legacy of Hours] Let's see, page five: ["Fencing"]

The Devil wields a trenchant blade,  
With light, elastic wrist;  
He thrust and feints and parries,  
With many a tricky twist.

Ah me! I would not cross his foils,  
Weary I turn to flee;  
But he, he taunts and challenges,  
And will not let me be.

Then comes "Surrender."

The Devil has me cornered,  
I stand at the empasse,  
Ah! Why must he withhold me,  
The Blessed coup-de-grace?

No more can I deny him,  
No more remain apart,  
So in resigned acceptance,  
I take him to my heart.

So, already then I'd taken duality to my heart, without knowing, without having any idea what this meant.



To begin with: WHY I AM NOT INTERESTED IN POLITICS. I say to myself that it makes little difference who is elected-- the same issues come up and again, the same interest; either oppose them or endorse them. As for foreign politics, I feel in a way they are beyond me-- I subscribe almost to Hardy's THE DYBBOTS -- some power beyond man controls the destinies of nations. On the other hand I know that basically I "don't want to get involved." Is this cowardice-- inertia-- what? In any case a mild sense of guilt accompanies my feeling.

I AM NOT A JOINER -- why don't I work with other people for the good of people? Again, am I afraid of involvement or just rest in inertia? I know only that the prospect of "meetings", group discussions repels me. I want to be left alone. Is it that when alone I can to some extent control matters, while in a group I would be subject to "majority" vote and other procedures, which basically I do not endorse? I assuage guilt by thinking, well, I taught children for a while, perhaps brought them something that might be of value to them. This conclusion isn't too satisfying, I'll admit.

WHY DO I NO LONGER ADDRESS MYSELF TO MUSIC? This is a poser-- I don't know. I have no desire to go to concerts, don't listen to music on the air, don't play the piano. Here again I tell myself what I am pretty sure is a fabrication: When I started to write poetry, I realized that poetry rather than music was my true bent-- I say, "when I practised, I was a "clock-watcher", when I wrote, I never knew time." But this doesn't explain why I don't listen to music-- I know only that I turn it all off. Considering that preoccupation with music was the larger part of my young life, I find it hard to explain-- no, impossible, this reversal.

WHY I DON'T LIKE PARTIES. I know the answer here, I think. I have no facility at small talk, don't know how to get started with a stranger, tend to withdraw. This, I believe is a neurotic trait-- but then aren't the others, too? I find now I don't care to go out much. Is it that I feel some security in my own four walls?

Well, here they are, my alibis. How do I make peace with them? I think I have recourse to a sort of concept that I have in some way earned the right to be myself-- that I have absolved myself from "musts. This, again may be self delusion, but it does give me a measure of stability-- and I sure need that!



Riess: Has that really worked, that what you can't fight, you accept?

Arnstein: You don't want to accept the evil in you, but you are dual. Unless you accept this, you remain very much on the surface. Did I ever tell you about the anti-Semitic situation in a walk I had with my friend?

Riess: Yes. [see pp. 92, 93]

Arnstein: And I also told you that I had just now arrived at the real understanding of what that poem meant.

Riess: Have you in any way updated your piece on gerontology?

Arnstein: No, but one thing is wrong in it, and I'll tell you what it is. I wrote that I was light-headed so often, and I attributed that to age. It wasn't attributable to age, because after my husband died, I never became so again. I think it related to worry rather than age. That I would amend if I were to rewrite it.

### "Old Stories"

Riess: I'm very pleased that you've discussed the work with Dr. Settlege in depth because that's very current. I want the oral history to be up to date and current in that way.

Arnstein: I see, yes.

Riess: In fact, I want to hear now what message you have for me, because this is the last interview.

Arnstein: I have nothing more to give you. You have nothing more to ask?

Riess: I figure you must have something you want to say, just "right off the cuff." As I said, maybe you have a message.

Arnstein: I'm not a prophet. What are you projecting on me?

Riess: [laughs] That's true, I am projecting on to you, yes.

Arnstein: I have a comment, but not a message. The comment is that you're a very good interviewer. [laughs]

I do think that the things I've written may have some significance for people, so I would like them to be in the oral history, you see, as many as can be quoted.

Riess: I was interested to read your stories. There is a characteristic ending in some that gave me a sinking feeling.

Arnstein: The "Ballet Lesson," [Stories, p. 1] Well, of course. I must tell you a funny story about that. I read it in one of my adult story writing groups. My cousin, who was known as Tottie in the little book, rang me up the next day and said, "I couldn't sleep all night, I was so unhappy." I said, "What were you unhappy about?" She said, "That poor little woman, she meant so well." "But this is only a story, it's just fiction." [laughs]

"Shadow," [Stories, p. 17] of course, is about two people that don't get along.

Then "The Turn." [p. 22] That deals with the beginning of adolescence, when this girl is beginning to be conscious of her relation to boys and she is confused about it. "She could feel him looking at her, but she could never meet his eyes. She did not know why, nor understand the vague trouble that came when she thought of their meeting."

"Grandma." [p. 26] Grandma gives all her money to the one grandchild that defied her.

"Proverbs." [p. 31] That's just silly. I don't think that's worth talking about.

"The Horse and I." [p. 34] That's just a silly one, too.

"On the Sideline." [p. 38] I knew a woman who was like the one described. She had affairs after she was married, and she used her youngest son as a go-between. He hated her. He knew he'd been used.

Riess: There is always some kind of twist at the end of your stories.

Arnstein: Well, most stories today are open-ended. They are not finished like, "they lived happily ever after."

Here, "The Composer" [p. 78] is an artist who is of two allegiances, to his art and to his life.

"The Aged Stood Up." [p. 69] That was actually something that happened to me, a cook I had who had heart trouble, and when she left me she was living in an apartment with a lot of old ladies who were all Catholics and she was a Lutheran. I visited her. It helped me come to terms with my own age, which I had not done before. I noted the brown spots on my hands.

Arnstein: "Son." [p. 64] Well, this is lack of appreciation.

"Bro." [p. 61] That was the one about the man who keeps bringing presents to this little girl. He doesn't recognize that she has grown up, and that she is no longer a child.

This one, "The Carousel," is of a man who doesn't understand his son. [p. 57] I have commentaries on this story by Herbert Blau, to whom I gave it. I handed him a term paper and I said, "I'll give you a little fantasy, because I think all work and no play makes man a dull boy." So he writes me a commentary on this. He says, "All fathers are not like this anymore." [laughs] I don't know. [Vignettes, pp. 103-104]

Riess: One of my problems is the stories are never long enough. The short story is not my favorite genre.

Arnstein: I'm only just now beginning to read short stories and becoming interested.

"Chapter X"--a funny thing happened. [p. 49] Caroline told me that the term Chapter 10," is used for discarding things. Here the writer deals with a man who's been through the war, and hopes to exorcise his own horror of it by writing. Then he has this creature come to him, the real man he should have written about, the man who really objects to war. So he tears up his first paper, and he starts again on Chapter 1. That's a positive thing.

"Legacy," I don't know what in the world that comes out of. [p. 44]

Riess: I didn't make a copy of this because I didn't know whether you were going to give this to The Bancroft Library, but I should make a copy of it.

Arnstein: I will give this ultimately to The Bancroft Library, yes. They ought to have all my writing.

Riess: Here is Herbert Blau's commentary on "Carousel."

Arnstein: Yes.

This is a nice little, rhythmic sketch, mildly bitter-sweet, or rather it's your own sweet realism of feeling, like that of the lyric with it. Only fathers, and I speak for one, have become cagier these days, some of them at least. They don't fall so easily into the



Arnstein: trap of truth. Give us time, and we'll all be believing that fairy tales are true. This father in your sketch is a square, not me, not me.

I want to read you this, not because it goes in here but because--I wrote:

Art, unlike other disciplines, is not measured by progress. Beethoven is not better than Bach. Each artist creates according to what is relevant to him or her. So, the fact that my poems are undated should not be disturbing. I have written what the lapse of time, and the events in my life have brought about. But though art does not progress, the artist may grow, or if one doesn't designate change as growth, then he may approach a subject with a different perspective. The following two poems are offered as illustration, the first was written some time in my forties, the last in my nineties.

Riess: That's a very nice manifesto. Do you really believe that, that you haven't had an absolute progression in some of your writing?

Arnstein: I don't know whether it's a progression or not, I wouldn't be in a position to judge. Somebody else has to judge whether there is progression, because one might have illusions about oneself.

Riess: That's back to our original discussion about measurement. It's not measurable.

Arnstein: No, that's right.

That's it. This has been fun; I've enjoyed it.

Transcriber: Lisa Grossman  
Final Typist: Catherine Winter

This manuscript has been edited in order to group subjects that came up intermittently in the interviews, and for this reason a tape guide is not appended. The Bancroft Library holds the tapes of Interviews #5 and #8. Those two tapes were selected because of the material discussed, the fidelity of the tape, and the close adherence to the final manuscript.

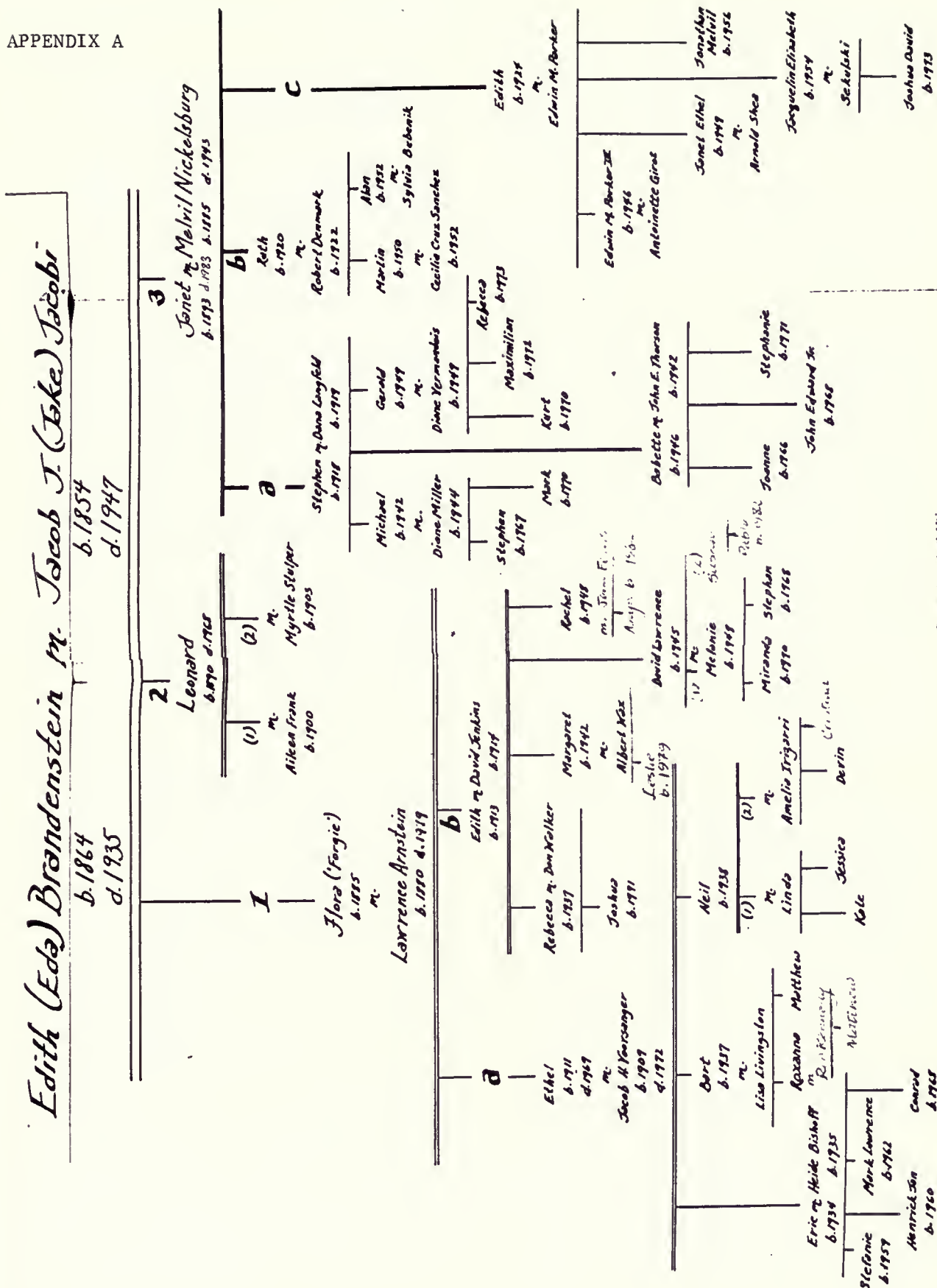


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# Growing Up In The Nineties

By Flora Arnstein

■ In the days before television, while we were still enthralled by that new gadget, the radio, there were occasional programs of interviews such as we see today on tv. One of the questions asked the interviewees was invariably, "Where do you come from?" That anyone might be a San Franciscan never seemed to occur to the questioner. Well, I am one of those rarities that used to be called affectionately, "A Native (Son or) Daughter of the Golden West," and though I was never interviewed on radio, I can point proudly to ninety years of residence in "our fair city." I do not indulge in nostalgia for that long gone time. However, I would like to recall some aspects of the early days that might be of interest to the few octogenarians or nonagenarians who are still about, perhaps even to some of the younger generation who occasionally ask me how it was in "the olden days."

The first house I remember living in was situated on Van Ness Avenue, between Clay and Washington streets. It was a modest structure, like many of the old Victorian houses which are being reclaimed today, but it did have its share of columns and curlicues.

The inside of the house conformed to the stereotype of the day: a front and back parlor, either one of which contained the inevitable cabinet for bibelots — filagree fans, trinkets, porcelain shepherdesses of pastel colors, and cream-brown carved ivory figurines. The back parlor opened into the pantry with its rows of shelves of dishes, and its wash-basin served by water from high goose-necked spigots. This room abutted into the kitchen.

Here dominating the scene stood the formidable iron coal-burning stove, with its rounded openings covered by lids that had to be lifted by a special tool. Opposite it was the ice-box, replenished semi-weekly by brawny icemen carrying slung over their shoulders great chunks of ice. Opening from the kitchen was a "stoop" where deliveries were made and where a garbage can made its presence recognizable by not too delectable odors.

The second story, accessible from a

narrow stairway, was given over to bedrooms, the one bath-tub, tin and claw-legged, and a "watercloset." The third story was the attic, a repository for trunks, discarded furniture and whatever flotsam and jetsam were no longer of use to the inhabitants below. Here, too, was a playroom for the children, and the servants' quarters.

Our second home, following the western trend of the city, was on Broadway, between Gough and Octavia, directly across the street from the house of Thomas Starr King, then minister of the Unitarian Church, with whose sons, Thomas, Jr. and Boswell, I played on sunny days.

Crossing streets was not then the hazardous venture it is today. Slow vehicles drawn by horses presented little risk, and were few and far between. The streets themselves were a source of interest not matched by the monotonous parade of automobiles of our time. Some streets were cobbled in big round stones, and to children (gory little creatures) the sight of a horse losing its foothold, lying on the ground and struggling to get disentangled from its traces presented a special kind of macabre pleasure. Later, when we had moved again, this time to a house topping a hill, on the corner of Pine and Gough Streets, we watched fascinated as great percherons drawing fire engines labored precariously up the cobbled slope. The engines, innocent of sirens, afforded for all warning a brass bell shaken by a fireman sitting beside the driver — though a warning could hardly have been necessary, considering the pace of the vehicles. How these ever arrived at a burning dwelling in time to extinguish a fire is a miracle.

Other vehicles circulated the streets in the residential districts. There was the "Rags, Bottles, Sacks" man in his rickety cart drawn by a decrepit horse. The articles he solicited in a high-pitched whine were never forthcoming from our home. There was another equally decrepit rig whose driver chanted over and over something that sounded like "Wile Gee, Wile Gay," which translated became recognizable as "Wild Geese, Wild Game." We did not patronize him, either, but he must have had customers, as he reappeared regularly at appropriate seasons of the year.

Organ-grinders visited our block, their boxes propped on a single leg. All held on a leash diminutive monkeys, sad little grey creatures, dressed in red jackets and pants. At the end of a rendition of an operatic aria, usually the sextet from *Lucia*, the monkeys would take off their peaked caps. Drawing the elastic from under their chins, and holding in their claw-like hands a little tin cup, they would circulate through whatever audience might be standing about. Dimes and nickels

*continued*



clicked in the cups — our mother threw our contribution folded in paper out the second story window.

Calamities brought out a rash of newsboys, bellowing "Extra! Extra!" and we children were sent down the street to bring our elders' reports of these untoward happenings.

Evenings the streets offered a special pleasure. In the long twilight of summer, children played until darkness was ushered in by the appearance of the lamplighter. Carrying a slim pole which he lifted to turn on the lights, he progressed down the street, light after light following his steps. On clear nights the chain of lights extended into the far distance; on foggy nights, as we looked out the window, each lamp-post became the center of a glimmering circle of grey mist that lent the scene a glamorous air of mystery.

Sidewalks flanking the streets were often constructed of wood planks, inadequately planed, which accounted for the unending splinters plaguing incautious stumbling children — whose hands and knees were later subjected to the torture of needles and antiseptics. Empty lots abounded, where wild licorice, oats and poison oak flourished — the latter the source of much torment, especially in the spring, when the new-budding leaves were not yet identifiable. Year after year children came down with the itching irritation. At that time there was no remedy.

For transportation in the early days there were only cable cars. On fair days we children thought nothing of walking ten blocks to school and back, though on rainy days we were permitted the luxury of taking the Polk Street cable car, four blocks from our home.

At the end of California Street there was a sort of shed that housed a little train — an engine and a couple of open cars — that made the trip to the Cliff House, coming to a stop somewhere between Sutro Gardens and Sutro Baths. Youngsters would race to commandeer seats on the car side facing the Bay, so as to have a choicer outlook as the train skirted the cliffs. The baths were a garishly decorated structure. We children were not permitted to swim.

Past the baths were the souvenir shops that still line the winding street, and below these was the "Bird Man," with his cage of canaries. His performance delighted all children, simple as they were then and unsophisticated by tv fare. He spoke in what to us was a

strange lingo, probably cockney, and he had trained his canaries to perform a variety of astonishing tricks. There was one I particularly savored in which a bird drew a string by his beak, thus detonating a miniature cannon, at which volley another bird fell down as if dead. No trip to the Cliff House was complete without this entertainment.

Additional amusements were provided by Golden Gate Park. The Sunday concert, at a different location than that of today, gave us what might roughly be called the equivalent of today's rock and roll: the brass band blaring out the popular tunes of the time. What would our teenagers today think of the sentimentality of "Alice Ben Bolt who wept with delight when you gave her a smile, and trembled with fear at your frown?"

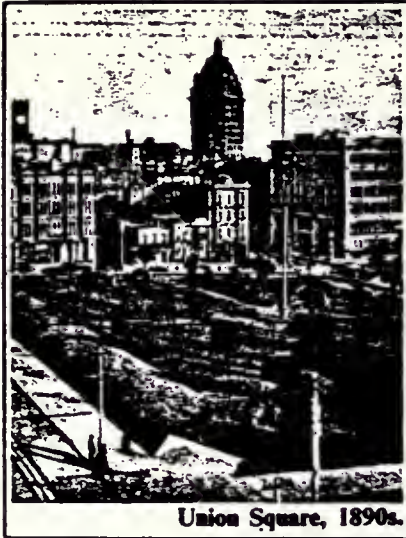
The Children's Playground, still operating, gave infinite pleasure, though it would be hard to explain why a ride on the slow-footed donkeys making their laborious way around an oval path should afford any sort of delight. But generation upon generation of children have testified to the joys of the Merry-Go-Round. We rode the fantastic beasts, bobbing up and down in their slots, and always deplored the shortness of the ride — assessing the while whether our parents would be willing to give us the fare for another round.

There was Stow Lake where we threw scraps of bread to the water-fowl — an amusement which like the Merry-Go-Round has survived the years. The real treat, though, was rowing a boat. At first we were permitted only the flat-bottomed dories, which we later spurned as being too dedicated to safety. We had graduated by then, our skill in rowing having improved, to the round bottom boats, lighter and easier to handle, and these we steered through the tunnels, shouting the while to hear our voices echoed. All too soon time was up — why was fun so time-limited?

In the city proper there was the Chutes, situated between Clayton and Cole Street, where one could ride the sloping ramp and end up afloat in water, or dare the dizzy height of the Ferris Wheel, flirting with a not too probable danger.

Theatres then did not have to compete with movies. The Tivoli was dedicated to legitimate drama, the Orpheum to variety shows. Minstrels in black-face were then in vogue, and "Mr. Bones," the approximate equivalent

*continues*



Union Square, 1890s.

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*"All that remains of  
the old flavor of the  
city is the location."*

---

lent of today's MC's, solicited his company for their specialties — a song accompanied by a banjo, or a breezy commentary on topics of the day. For the more cultured audience there were concerts, solo recitals by singers, pianists, violinists, occasional traveling opera companies.

No recollection of the early days would be complete without some reference to the stupendous meals eaten by those who could afford them. On Sundays or special occasions menus such as the following were not uncommon: First, a serving of oysters, on the half-shell, reposing on a bed of chopped ice. Then a substantial soup. Then a fish dish, accompanied by salad, followed by a roast served with vegetables and potatoes, not to mention what was called "Roman Punch," a sort of sherbert, that was, however, no substitute for an authentic dessert. Fruit, nuts and coffee brought the meal to an end.

For children, life in the nineties had a sense of a certain serenity compared with the violence and wars of today. (I can well remember my disillusionment at the outbreak of the Spanish-American war — dispelling the conviction that all wars were a thing of the remote past.) And this backward glance somehow forces me to repudiate my earlier statement that no nostalgia enters the picture. San Francisco was then a small city. One could never go downtown without running into friends or acquaintances. Even the stores had a sort of intimacy. How many of these are now gone! There was Davis-Schonwasser's that catered to brides for their trousseaus, and to teenagers, who had not acquired the status of today, but were considered to be at the awkward age, neither child nor woman. There was the White House across the street, which supplied all household needs but kitchenware, this last the province of Nathan Dohrmann. There was Goldberg-Bowen, which supplied delicacies for special celebrations, and O'Connor-Moffat's, which featured laces not obtainable elsewhere. Now that the City Of Paris is no more, all connection with the downtown past is only a memory.

Today San Francisco is cosmopolitan — one rarely meets friends on the streets; one is as much a stranger in the city as though one had in truth come from someplace else. Automobiles, high-rise buildings, all unknown to the old-timers, create an atmosphere almost impossible to reconcile with the slow pace, the low dwellings of our early days.

All that remains of the old flavor of the city is the location: the hills, which one can view as in the past, vistas of Tamalpais, the Bay, the Islands, Angel, Alcatraz, and what we used to call "Goat Island." But in spite of changes, these vistas are enough to make San Francisco the crown of the Golden West, the repository of our dreams. □



## APPENDIX C

Page 8 Sunday Scene

March 5, 1972

S. F. Sunday Examiner &amp; Chronicle

By Caroline Drewes

"I GET MORE satisfaction than I give," says Janet Nickelsburg firmly. "Old people, you know, can just stay home and feel sorry for themselves."

Dressed in an aqua Oriental robe, she is seated, this afternoon before her 79th birthday, in the "dining room-work room" of her view apartment in Cow Hollow.

Mrs. Nickelsburg is a nationally known, award-winning teacher, writer, lecturer and naturalist, and in her field is largely self-taught. She has had nine books published, has completed three more, and is presently working on another, this one having to do with astronomy. About the latter work, she will say no more. "Lots of eggs are laid that aren't hatched."

In the past, she has written and produced both a prize winning radio show and an educational television show.

A longtime widow, with nine grandchildren and seven great-grandchildren, it has been her concern and her delight, through the years, to teach children and their counselors and teachers how to see, how to hear, and how to understand the natural world in which they live.

For 30 of those years, until a difficult but successful operation a decade ago, she lived with and surmounted the handicap of deafness. Although she says her hearing is deteriorating again, "through age," and she has resumed the use of a hearing aid, she feels fortunate for what she has had.

"I don't like any part of being old," she observes parenthetically. "But I ac-

# Age On a Youth Kick



Janet Nickelsburg

cept it as gracefully as I can. The poet Browning," she adds with a smile, "was a very young man when he wrote 'Grow old with me, The best is yet to be'."

There are paintings, oriental rugs, a multitude of family pictures and plants in Mrs. Nickelsburg's charming small apartment. But more than anything else, there is an abundance of books. She has acquired a magnificent natural science library.

Currently she is studying ichthyology at the Academy of Science (where she is a docent) because "I don't know anything about fish." And she is continuing to teach elementary science as a volunteer for the San Francisco Education Auxiliary.

★ ★ ★

**A**CROSS THE city, in Golden Gate Heights, lives Janet Nickelsburg's 86-year-old sister, Flora Arnstein, who has just offered her services to the auxiliary. (Mrs. Arnstein has seven grandchildren and

"11 and three quarters" great-grandchildren.)

"Our interests are far apart," says Janet Nickelsburg. "I've been devoted to my sister in all my life. She is far more sensitive than I. She has been a teacher and she is a poet."

"With poetry and natural science, with education the bridge, in the case of these two vital and useful sisters, the generation gap narrows."

"Young people," says Mrs. Nickelsburg, "are really going ahead. I don't admire the way they look sometimes, but it's just an outward sign there's something stirring inside. Sometimes their ideas are cuckoo, but sometimes so are mine."

"There is a great yeast in youth," she adds approvingly.

Mrs. Arnstein's poems have appeared in numerous publications. "I have had only two books published, but both are in their third printing," she says, a small woman in a rose wool dress, brisk and vigorous as her sister.

There is a grand piano in the garden window of the living room in the house she shares with her husband Lawrence. There are plants and paintings.

"My sister," Flora Arnstein says, "is a very original thinker. She has made a real contribution to the study of nature. It is very strange, we both started late in life. I didn't begin to teach or write until my late forties. I began to write spontaneously and it was like a dam bursting — I wrote and I wrote and I wrote."

"For 15 years I taught poetry and dance music at Presidio Hill School," she interrupts herself: "I don't teach poetry, I share it."



**Flora Arnstein**

(Mrs. Arnstein helped found that school 54 years ago.)

"In all my teaching experience, only one child failed to respond to poetry and he was a child with an overwhelming interest in science."

On a whim, you ask her definition of a poem and she answers, "No one has ever made a definition of poetry that was inclusive enough." When you persist, she says, "I know one when I see one . . . I know it isn't a turnip."

★ ★ ★

**T**HE REASON for her own and her sister's contin-

ued usefulness, Mrs. Arnstein believes, is association with young people. "For five years children came to my home to read poetry. They were surprised when I thanked them for coming and I explained if it hadn't been for them I might have been an old fuddy-duddy up on a shelf."

One of many of her published poems, "Sea Horses," appeared in a summer edition of *The Nation*.

"The mottled swimming hordes,  
Profiles and lidless eyes,  
Circle aquarium walls,  
As though mere fin and tail

**Defined all motion.**

Only the sea horse,  
perpendicular.

Erects his Gothic  
stance.

Turns in a slow periphery

His claim for starkness.  
The acid edge of cliff  
and crag."





## APPENDIX D

San Francisco Examiner

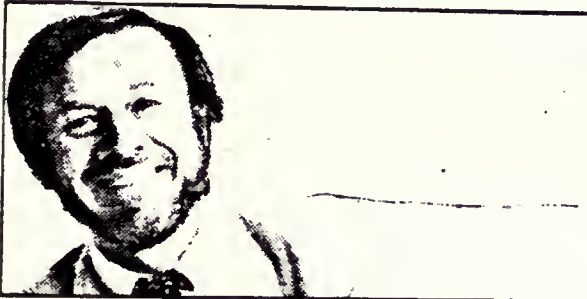
1981

Want Ad Supermarket

SECTION



## Dwight Chapin



### Nurturing knowledge

**J**ANET NICKELSBURG ASKED FOR THE straight-backed chair, allowing as how if you're 88 years old, you need all the support you can get.

"I wish age were a state of mind," she said. "but it's got a lot of drawbacks, let me tell you. I'm satisfied that I still have a brain."

With only minimal urging, her brain was at work, probing back through a life of staggering achievement, a life that despite some physical infirmities is still brimming with accomplishment.

Janet Nickelsburg was in familiar surroundings, a room near the office at Presidio Hill School. Her sister, Flora Arnstein (now 95), and Helen Salz started the school on Washington Street in 1918. Janet Nickelsburg sent her three children there, taught there for 10 years — and learned to teach there, from a memorable principal named Marion Turner.

"I remember," Janet Nickelsburg said, that there was a lot next door to the school. Part of it was used for a playground, part for a garden where the children raised vegetables and grew flowers. We had trouble because the children didn't want to water the plants. As I recall they had to carry cans of water quite a way to do it.

**'The function of a test shouldn't be a game in which one student beats another student'**

"I went to Miss Turner and told her I was worried the plants wouldn't live and she said, 'What's more important, plants or children? If the children don't water the plants they'll die, and the children will learn something.'"

Janet Nickelsburg doesn't remember if the plants lived. "I only remember that I learned a lesson," she said.

Presidio Hill School hasn't changed much in 63 years. Janet Nickelsburg taught general science there without salary. "There never was much money floating around this place," she said. Saturday night from 7 to 11 at Gresham Hall of Grace Cathedral, the school will hold a "fantasy auction" to help meet current financial needs.

The educational process at Presidio Hill isn't much different than it was at the end of World War I, either. It's still a private, alternative school, based on the "progressive" principles of John Dewey that encourage independent thinking, questioning, experimenting, evaluating from 75 students that range in age from 4½ to 13.

"I know the general feeling has been that in progressive schools there is not just liberty but license," Janet Nickelsburg said, "that the students run wild. But that's just not true.

"My relationship with students (who have included Pierre Salinger and Arthur Hoppe) has always been one of mutual respect. I expect respect and I give it in return. I always have figured the material I teach carries its own discipline. And unless I make that material interesting, I have failed.

"I never have given an exam I marked. I want to see how well I've taught. We go over things point by point. I think it is demeaning to grade. It's just my opinion against theirs. The function of a test shouldn't be a game in which one student beats another student. Besides, if I graded and had had a headache that morning, I'd be in a bad mood and give bad grades."

**J**ANET NICKELSBURG'S METHODS haven't varied regardless of where she's taught — and she's still teaching a couple of times a week in San Francisco public schools, and elsewhere when asked.

She loves nature, and she loves children, in about equal measure. She's been called a "nature missionary." She was an early television pioneer here with nature shows, has been on radio, has written nine books (all since she was 60) on science, nature and environment. For 30 years, until a successful operation in the early '60s, she was deaf but overcame the handicap. At 70, she became president of the San Francisco Hearing Society. She's worked with countless kids at camps, with Campfire Girls and Girl Scouts and Cub Scouts.

The Discovery Room at the California Academy of Sciences was opened with her inspiration and support, in 1978.

On TV, she was able to tap the magic of children without exploiting them. She could draw them out, make them talk, argue, debate, go into flights of rapture over their prize snake, lizard, shell or fossil.

A newspaper reporter asked her once to tell him some of the funny (and embarrassing) things the kids said off camera. She refused. "I never even gave anything but first names on my shows," she said.

Even now the only stories she'll share from those days of three decades ago are gentle ones like this: "On a live show once, this little boy went under the table to retrieve his lizard. I said, 'Come on out of there; we can't see you.' And he replied, 'I can't. If I do that, I might lose my lizard.'"

## APPENDIX E

San Francisco Chronicle  
December 21, 1984  
from "People, In Focus"

# Thoughts On Growing Very Old

*How I rejoice in everything  
around me:  
My circular glass stairway,  
My tiers of books,  
The very rugs I walk on.*

*It is as though with age  
I had been given new eyes,  
And all the commonplace turns  
special.*

*Colors are pennants,  
Curtains drape novel folds,  
The knobs of door  
Shape to my hands.*

*All rivals all in giving.*

— Flora J. Arnstein

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BY JERRY CARROLL

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**A**s the graying of American continues, the number of very old people among us increases, people who have survived into their 90s or even to their 100s.

They are alone, for the most part, having outlived family and the friends of youth, maturity and what gerontologists call early old age. A few manage to get by without help, but most live in retirement homes or convalescent hospitals where the ordinary burdens of day-to-day existence — shopping, fixing meals, keeping house — are handled by somebody else.

We thought it would be

interesting to interview some of the very old, the people over 90, to find out — what? The secret of long life? That age confers wisdom? We didn't quite know.

What we found was that the old are very much like everybody else. There are optimists and pessimists, activists and fatalists, the chipper and the gloomy. People who, on looking back, found a pattern and meaning to existence; people who weren't sure it meant anything they could put into words.

What all those living on their own had in common was an active mind. Even the pessimists hadn't succumbed to apathy. They doubted the future would bring anything good, but they still were curious what form the newest outrage would take.

Although they were born in the gaslight-and-candle era, long before anyone considered the idea of brain research — long, in fact, before the electric light, the telephone, the automobile and other such marvels of the modern age became commonplace — they are not surprised by recent research that says you have to stay active and interested if you are to continue playing with a full deck.

Some thumbnail portraits follow.



## Flora Arnstein, 99

**F**lora J. Arnstein, 99, a retired educator and writer who still pens poetry, lives in her well-kept home on Diamond Heights with its view of the Golden Gate Bridge. On her birthday, she lunches with her daughters in the Sheraton-Palace at the spot where she used to alight from a horse-drawn carriage when arriving for a dance.

"There are aspects about aging that are negative. You can't walk or drive anymore, and there are all sorts of things you can't do. But you live long enough to see the development of children and the students you've had, how they've turned out. Age doesn't bring wisdom — a lot of old people have no wisdom at all (this with a laugh). What you have instead is experience, if you're able to put it to use.

"I was 12 years old when the Spanish-American War broke out. I thought, after that, war was a thing of the past. But look at the paper today. I don't follow politics anymore. I saw Harding once when he drove past our house. He was going to see the de Young who ran The



Chronicle. He lived next door to my parents on California Street.

"I don't look forward to my 100th birthday. I live just day to day. I wake up every day glad I'm not in a nursing home or hospital, but in my own home. A good life? Oh, yes. Many sorrows, but then that's part of life, too."

## APPENDIX F

**Presidio Hill Co-Founder****She's Checking It Out***By Donovan Bess*

Flora Arnstein, who helped found a school to get her children a more liberal education, visited that school yesterday, 54 years after she and another worried mother thought up the idea.

Mrs. Arnstein, who is 86, parked her car a block from the Presidio Hill School at 3839 Washington street and checked the action. She found out that, as in 1918, the school operates on the conviction that "the three R's are not an end in themselves."

In that year, she and another ambitious mother, Helen Salz, founded out what turned out to be the first "progressive school" in the west. She taught there for 17 years.

**TRAINING**

Did she have any teacher training?

"I am a drop out," she said. "I dropped out at 14 to study music but I've gone to college off and on ever since."

"A few years ago I was at (San Francisco) State College studying English. My daughter was there getting a master's and my granddaughter was there, too."

Two of her pupils at Presidio Hill were Arthur Hoppe, Chronicle columnist, and Pierre Salinger, who began his career as a Chronicle copy boy and later became John F. Kennedy's press secretary.



FLORA ARNSTEIN  
'The children seem happy'

"Pierre," she said, "was an original kid — very musical, and responsive to anything esthetic. He was in my poetry classes for five years."

**COTTAGE**

As for Hoppe: "He was a wonderful, brilliant boy."

When she and Mrs. Salz

started the school in a cottage on the site there were only 15 children enrolled, all in kindergarten. Now the students range up to age 15 and the school has a principal, eight classroom teachers, three special teachers and numerous parent volunteers.

Mrs. Arnstein dissociated herself from the school, she said, because she became "out of sympathy with" the head teacher, whose practices were too conventional for her taste.

She has not returned to Presidio Hill for a visit for many years, but was persuaded to do so because the school's governing board is planning a founder's day banquet and wants to involve her and Mrs. Salz.

**TOUR**

After a tour of the school with the principal, Bob Muller, she said the children "seem happy and relaxed and that's all to the good."

The school, despite its location amid the stately homes of Pacific Heights, has children of various races in attendance and can hardly be called conventional. In its brochure, it boasts that the physical education curriculum includes yoga and states:

"Reading is learned through the organic method — learning to read from one's own writing. From the beginning, it is treated less as a subject and more as something to do, along with writing, listening, creating, and enjoying."

There is clearly an abundance of enjoyment at Presidio Hill. The principal, known to the students as plain Bob, said "they actually like to be in school."

The Founders' Day banquet will be held on April 22 at the Fairmont Hotel.



## FLORA J. ARNSTEIN

## APPENDIX G

(It is appropriate that Mrs. Arnstein should come first, because, besides having the letter A in her name, she was one of the founders of this school and has given it 20 years of service and devotion. She now teaches poetry and folkdancing.)

I was born in San Francisco in 1885. At the age of seven I was subjected to my first and only school, which employed what has been referred to as the "regurgitive" method of education - one was supposed to imbibe so and so many facts and regurgitate them at the teacher's demand. English, of all my subjects, was, however, taught by a woman with a genuine love of the subject, with the result that it alone has remained of my elementary education - excepting, of course, the "tool subjects" which I seem somehow to have painlessly assimilated.

At fifteen my parents acceded to my request and for the next few years I pursued my study of music, piano and harmony and my other subjects by means of private lessons. I was most fortunate in my teacher - Mr. Oscar Weil, who, in addition to being an accomplished musician, was a man of wide culture, informed along many lines.

At eighteen my family made a trip to Europe, and we traveled through Germany, France and England, making however no lengthy stay anywhere. On our return, and immediately after the San Francisco earthquake, our family moved to Berkeley. Here I attended the University as a special student. However, my college experience was short lived - I had an opportunity to go East to study music, so I left home and spent the winter in New York, studying under Rubin Goldmark for harmony and Rafael Joseffy for piano.

In 1910 I was married and with the arrival of my two children I became interested in education. Around that time the first English publication of the work of Mme. Montessori occurred in, I believe, Munsey's Magazine. Her theory of the relation of interest to learning won a ready response from me, and I sent for her first set of educational material that was on the market. During the 1915 Fair in San Francisco I entered my eldest child in the Montessori demonstration kindergarten under the direction of Helen Parkhurst, who was Mme. Montessori's representative in this country, and who later founded her own school in New York.

In 1920 my sister-in-law, Mrs. Salz, and I decided that we wanted a progressive education for our children, and to that end built and operated the Presidio Open Air School. Later other parents joined us in the project - which was run by the parents

## FLORA J. ARNSTEIN

until in 1925 Miss Turner took over. On her invitation I taught a class of music that first year, and in the second year two or more groups. From then on I taught music, folk-dancing, poetry and, for one year, English to the two upper groups. Thereafter for some five years I was group teacher for the Junior High grades.

I have omitted to mention that during my years of teaching I had been writing poetry. I have been inspired, if I may permit myself such a pretentious term, By Mr. Hughes Mearns' Creative Youth. Immediately on finishing this book I began to write. On the occasion of my visiting the East at Northampton I took my poems to Grace Hazard Conkling who was then professor of creative writing in Smith College. From her I received much help in the way of constructive criticism. I have had poems published in Poetry and in Palms, both magazines of verse, in The London Mercury, and reprints in The Literary Digest and The Herald Tribune as well as in the New York Times, The Sun, and other papers and magazines, and anthologies. During the early years of my teaching I became interested in psychology and studied at the University of California under Drs. Bridgman and McFarlane, also doing some work with analytical psychologists. My interest in education I relate directly to the lacks and felt needs of my own as a child. My sympathy has always been aroused by the under-privileged and misunderstood child. I have expressed it in a poem called "Unborn".

My little son that never was at all  
Looks out at me from lonely children's eyes,  
I know him in the wordless and the meek,  
The patient ones without surprise.

Too gentle to reproach, yet what reproach  
Is there for me, guiltless of any sin  
But this, to see in each unhappy child  
My laughing boy that should have been.

As an outcome of my poetry work with children I have written and had published several articles on education, and this brings me to 1940, October 21st, upon which date I submit this autobiography at the request of Mrs. Duveneck.

## APPENDIX H

## FLORA ARNSTEIN

Poems published in the following periodicals:

Argonaut

Augusta Georgia Chronicle March 19, 1933.

Boston Herald July 12, 1930.

Bozart and Contemporary Verse November, 1929. March, 1930.

Contemporary Vision 1930-

Dominion News Morgantown West Virginia March 26, 1933.

Christian Century July 23, 1930.

Greenville South Carolina News November 6, 1931.

Jewish Journal January 16, 1929. November 7, 1928. December 19, 1928. etc.

Literary Digest reprint from London Mercury November 4, 1933.

Literary Lantern April 12, 1930. July 12, 1930.

London Mercury February, 1931. October, 1933.

Lyric West May, 1936.

The Midland March, 1931. January, 1931.

Montclair Times September 13, 1930.

New York Herald Tribune January 12, 1930. May 25, 1930.

New York Sun March 13, 1930. June 6, 1930. June 14, 1930. April 12, 1930.  
etc.

New York Times March 12, 1931.

Omaha Nebraska Herald July 30, 1930.

Overland Monthly January, 1928. June, 1930. May, 1931.

Palms December, 1929. May, 1930. November, 1936. July, 1937.

Poetry September, 1931. December, 1932. March, 1933. January, 1936.

Poetry World March, 1931. June, 1930. July, 1930. February, 1933.

The San Franciscan September, 1928.

San Francisco Review January, 1926.

Unity June 2, 1930. June 30, 1930. December 1, 1930.

Virginia Pilot, Norfolk, Virginia March 26, 1933.

Woman's City Club Magazine September, 1928.



FLORA ARNSTEIN  
Printed Poems

Poetry World

Listen 1930  
Dance 1929  
Digger 1932  
Finery 1930  
Aged Fingers  
Captious Words 1930  
Aggrieved 1932  
Custom 1933

Nation

Sea Horses  
Only One Thing 1976

Poetry Northwest

On Being told 1965  
Garden Incident 1967  
Autumn  
Payment  
This Ghost  
Bleak Interlude

Blue Unicorn

This Band 1979  
I Wake  
T'was Brillig

Prairie Schooner

2 Poems:  
Stuff of Myth 1965  
Doppelganger 1965

Drowning 1965  
Frustrations 1957  
Of Shapes 1967  
2 Poems by Conrad 1968  
Stickle Wind 1968  
Winter 1968  
Mirage of Rivers 1967

## Anthologies

National Poetry Anthology

Fuchsia p. 19

Woman's Anthology

Window Sealed

Best Poems of 1934 - T. Mault

A Child Speaks - London Mercury  
p. 51

California Poets

Communication p. 55  
A Child Speaks p. 55  
Laurels p. 55  
Eyewitness p. 55

The Golden Years

Timers p. 14

North American Book of Verse

Bequest  
No Pledges

Contemporary Women Poets

I Have Set Them Down p. 132  
I Wake p. 132

FLORA ARNSTEIN  
Printed Poems

Overland Monthly

Seamstress 1930  
Designate 1930  
Betrayed 1931  
Return 1930  
Clouds 1930  
To the Poet 1928

P.J.

Chance 1954  
Morning 1954  
Autumn 1950

Womans City Magazine

Before Departure 1928  
Pleas 1927  
Christmas 1927  
Beauty Refound 1929  
Hope 1930  
Autumn in California

Unity

Prayer 1930  
Accusation 1930  
Freedom 1930

Pacific Spectator

Waking 1952

Experiment

Fullness of Space 1961  
Museums 1961

Palms

Eyewitness 1930  
Security 1930 (reprint)  
Hunger of Fingers 1937  
Three Questions 1929  
Relevance 1929  
This Must be Truth 1929  
You Who Have Long 1929  
The Look 1930  
Betrayed  
Even as Leaf Smoke 1936  
I Must Make a Poem 1936  
Aloof 1936  
Reality

University Review

The Day the Moon Left 1966  
Autumn

San Francisco Review

Art 1926

Poetry Magazine

No Pledges 1931  
Six poems: 1931  
Communication  
Only the Dome  
Plowing Song  
Fishes  
Gifts  
Knowing No More

Bequest 1933  
No Winter 1936

FLORA ARNSTEIN  
Printed Poems

Pine Cone

Now From Slack Haystack  
Waiting Chair  
Contours 1952  
Summer Child 1951

Jewish Journal

Cedars 1928  
Freedom 1928  
Yes out of Three 1928  
Age to Youth 1928  
Star Query 1929  
Inarticulate 1922  
Advocate 1922  
A word 1929  
Possession 1928  
Mona Lisa 1922  
Summers Future 1922

Christian Century

June 1930

Bozart

To the Crabbed 1930  
Catalogue  
Brittle Protest 1929

Accent

Gullo 1955

The Cresset

If the Eye

Literary Lantern

Dry Wind 1930 (reprint)  
Wings 1930 (reprint)

Midland

Interim 1931  
Sculptor 1931  
Gleaners 1931  
Emergence 1931

New Orleans Poetry Journal

Horses

London Mercury

The Bear 1931  
The Mouse 1931  
The Hummingbird 1931  
The Camel 1931  
A Child Speaks 1933

New York Herald Tribune

Security (reprint)

New York Sun

Shatley Heather 1930  
Treasures 1930  
Illusion 1930  
Rooted 1930  
Sea Lover 1930  
Rivers 1930  
Mastery 1930  
Happy Child 1930  
Messages 1930

New York Times

Only by This 1955  
Paradox 1957

Humanist

Exiles 1959

Lyric West

Lire 1926

## APPENDIX I

Foreword to Flora Arnstein's Children Write Poetry, 1967.

*Foreword*

FOR MANY YEARS in public and in private I have talked about Flora Arnstein and her accomplishment in bringing out the artistry of young children. In *The Creative Adult* I gave a brief picture of her reception and use of pure child communication, and would have presented more from her storehouse of material so generously offered but forbore to trespass further, assuring her that she had there the material for a valuable and needed book. That volume is before us now.

As a teacher and as an artist Flora Arnstein displays here her two great gifts: she knows the way into the inner spirit of childhood where lies unexpressed beauty; and she knows how to entice that dormant power into attractive self-expression. That beauty and power are expressed on every page of this book. Now others may know more about it, particularly mothers and teachers of the young, and by the contagion of her spirit bring forth beauty everywhere.

The beginning years are most important. Then it is that the creative spirit must be released again and again, and in an environment wholly favorable to it, for it must have the long, slow chance to grow in strength. An alien and unsympathetic world

## CHILDREN WRITE POETRY

could easily kill it unless it is protected and nurtured in the early years.

Not only beauty but wisdom is here; and kindness, pity, mercy, a care for living things, love of the world, unprejudiced observation, instinctive insight, the joy of sharing, a reaching out to other peoples, the very core of humanitarianism. It is there, and always has been there, in the guarded secrecy of child thinking and child feeling, an amazing potential power which could some day remake a troubled and distracted world.

Flora Arnstein belongs to that small but growing group of artist teachers who know that guided self-expression opens up important paths not only to cultural living but also to learning, to morality, and to health; that each revelation of the inner spirit thus successfully handled by adult guides has canceled at once a hundred personal and social problems of the faraway future.

HUGHES MEARNs

*Chairman of the Department of  
Creative Education, New York  
University*

August 12, 1946



Back cover

# *Children Write Poetry*

## A CREATIVE APPROACH

### *Flora J. Arnstein*

It is commonplace to feel that schooling "ruins" students for poetry. Flora J. Arnstein, on the contrary, for many years produced classrooms full of poetry enthusiasts—young boys and girls who not only enjoyed reading great poetry, but also wrote many fine poems of their own.

In this book, Mrs. Arnstein summarizes her method of conducting poetry classes. She discusses the teacher's role in introducing children to poetry, in inspiring them to write poetry of their own, and in helping them to develop critical criteria for judging their own and others' poetry. Over 250 poems illustrate the book, drawn from those written for Mrs. Arnstein's classes. Dictated by children as young as six years old, and written by boys and girls as old as fifteen, many are remarkably good.

Teachers in search of new ways to interest children will find these wonderful poems and Mrs. Arnstein's teaching method inspiring and engrossing, as will laymen interested in children and education.

"Teachers and parents . . . will find the book a new and fresh approach to the 'inner spirit' of children," *Elementary School Journal*. "For all who are interested in children's creative expression . . . inspiring and rewarding," *Horn Book*. "Highly recommended," *San Francisco Chronicle*.

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**In the Poetry in the Schools Movement—that eternal ingenue that presents itself to the public as always fresh and original—it is sometimes hard to remember that we have a history, with ancestors who broke the ground we are now standing on. Few of these ancestors are more deserving of respect than Flora Arnstein. She is the author of the classic studies, *Children Write Poetry* and *Poetry in the Classroom*, and one of the pioneers in the field of teaching children to write.**

Flora Arnstein is ninety-one years old. That in itself seems remarkable. Even more remarkable is that she continues to hold weekly classes in her home for the appreciation of poetry, as she has done for many years.

I discovered Flora Arnstein's books over eight years ago, when I began trying to teach children to write poetry. In the available literature, her books were among the only ones (David Holbrook's were the others) to treat the subject with a complex, balanced point of view, that took into account not only the tactics for getting children to write, but the child's well-being, and the growth of his or her consciousness over a substantial period of time. Her approach may be termed 'environmentalist,' in the sense of the artist-teacher considering the task of teaching writing as inexorably related to the social conditions of the school and the development of particular children—and therefore tending to stay in one setting over a longer period of time. It is an approach I came to share with her, which partly explains why I felt attracted to her work.

I was glad to be able to quote a passage I admired from *Children Write Poetry* when it came time to write my own book on the subject. One of her students apparently brought my book (with the passage) to Mrs. Arnstein's attention, and she wrote me a friendly letter, which opened a regular exchange of correspondence between us.

In July, I wrote to Mrs. Arnstein that I would soon be in the San Francisco area and, if she didn't mind, I would like to call

on her. She said that would be fine. I had in mind the idea of doing an interview with her and collecting some new texts by her for this magazine as a kind of *hommage*, the way the French do with their aged masters. The form was more clearly in my head than Flora herself. I was unsure what to expect when I went to meet her. Would she be quite feeble? Or one of those capricious, domineering old empresses who hold forth without tolerating interruption? I was almost hoping for the second kind. . . .

A few minutes late, I looked around for the titan I had planned to meet on Geary Street and practically bumped into an alert, extremely small, ordinary-looking woman in a fall coat. "Mr. Lopate?" she said. Her everyday lady-in-the-street quality came as something of a shock: at first a disappointment, then a relief. Of course (it hit me) this is what Flora Arnstein would look like. I should have realized from her prose, which is always so sensible and unaffected. She pointed me to her car, a comfortable large model, and began driving and talking with a matter-of-fact vitality which made me realize I understood very little about the potentials of nonagenarians. Here I had expected to assist a quivering twig-like thing in a wheelchair, and she was not frail at all; quite the contrary, she drove better than I did!

My *mise en scene* aborted, I lapsed into being a passenger. As she drove she began talking about the subject which she knew we shared—children and writing.

"You've been in part responsible for the vogue of teaching chil-

dren to write. What do you think of the recent poetry efforts in the schools?" I asked.

"Well I respect the fact that people are trying. I respect the fact that they have gotten something, from the children in terms of writing. But I'm not in accord with their aims—which seem to be based only on *results*, what kinds of thing they have to show for what they've done. Whereas I think the thing that's important is what's happening to the children. Their growth, and their immersion in poetry, which comes if you read to them a lot and talk over the poetry with them."

"So you think there's something wrong with trying to get kids to write poetry immediately?"

"Yes I certainly do," said Mrs. Arnstein. "I was on a panel recently at San Francisco State, and they put on a demonstration of working with children before an audience. First of all, they didn't make the right rapport with the kids. You have to have a rapport with them where the kids are not afraid to say anything they want to say. I didn't feel they did that: I felt they went in to get the kids to write, by hook or by crook, you know? And I think the only way to get kids to write is to write out of their own experience and the things that they've felt. As I've said in my book, poetry is recorded experience—or imagined experience. First introduce some poems to the kids that will get them talking about their own experience."

"How long does it usually take, in terms of weeks, after the first introduction of poetry for the





kids to start writing?"

"Well I don't force them to write. What I've done is to bring in books of poetry by other children and show this to the kids and they say, 'Oh, couldn't we write some poems?'—'If you like.' There's never any pressure on it. And if they don't want to, all right."

"You're probably aware, though," I remarked, "of the kinds of pressures that are put on the young writers who go in and teach. I'm not saying this just to defend them, but sometimes they're expected to fill quotas, to put out a little mimeographed publication in no time at all. I've been in places where, by the second week people say, 'When is the poetry book going to come out?'"

"You know, they don't realize that these things are a matter of growth! And development! I saw one of the guidebooks put out by this group, and as an exemplar of everything awful," she laughed, "it couldn't have been better."

"What did it say exactly?"

"Gosh I don't remember any more, I threw it away! But it was this business of insisting on early writing. And—mostly a lack of understanding of kids. You know, just because a person is a poet isn't any guarantee that he's a teacher or that he understands kids."

"Absolutely. Well, but there's no training for that."

"No." She stopped at a light, and looked sideways at me. "I was very fortunate because in the school that I taught our principal was very advanced. But with most of these teacher training programs, I don't think the emphasis is enough on children. It's on subject matter. Well, I'm not deprecating content, you have to teach something. But it's not enough on kids. And the same with the poets. If they understood kids, they would never exploit a bunch of children like that: taking them all around the country to answer questions about their writing. One little boy

was asked what happens when he writes a bad poem; he says he never writes any bad poems! Imagine!" she laughed incredulously. "It's just an exploitation. It's the wrong emphasis. You can't *plaster* culture on people. You can only develop it . . . under certain circumstances."

"Right. It has to grow from underneath."

"Right. That's why I object so much to criticism, because you don't know where any given child is at any given time. But you don't know with adults either; I've taught adult groups too. There's no way of guessing, outside of finding out where that person is in his own development and his own thinking. And when you do that with children you always come up with wrong answers."

"That's interesting. Still, don't you think you sometimes have to take the chance of criticizing because the kids won't trust you if they feel you're too neutral?"

"But I think they feel when you're with them. You establish that with your class. What I do when they come in is to tell them: 'I try to be fair, but very often a teacher doesn't know all the things that go into a situation. So I'll be glad anytime if you want to tell me what goes into things.' And then they know that you're with them; that you're not going to stand in judgment of them."

We stopped suddenly. "Here we are. Number 30." We had been driving up a steep hill in the Sunset District, near Parnassus Heights, and I had not really been paying attention to the houses except to note that they indicated order, love of flowers. Her house was semi-secluded behind a gate, with a garden in front; it had a multi-faced, two-story design made with natural redwood slats and large curtained picture windows. A 1930s clean, Bauhaus look.

"What an unusual-looking house. How did you come by it?" I asked.

"We built it," said Flora Arnstein, opening the door with her key. "The architect was a man named Wurster—he later became head of the architecture department at the University of California—Berkeley. We wanted an architect who wouldn't look down his nose at designing a small house."

Inside was a comfortable living room with a piano and a large picture window from which one could see all of downtown San Francisco and the bridge. "Excuse me, I'm just going upstairs to see my husband and tell him I've arrived. He doesn't like to be left alone." She disappeared up a cream-carpeted spiral staircase, so steep that it reminded me of a fireman's pole.

"Now," she said, returning a few moments later, "can I get you some lunch?"

"Yes, please," I said simply, since it had already been arranged beforehand that I would eat there.

"Oh, I wanted to show you some of the poetry books that the children made." She went over to the bookcase behind the piano. "These were all hand-printed by the children. They chose the poems from all those that were written during the year, and they learnt how to operate the printing machine. It took so long and they got so involved in the job that I had to get them release time from their other classes."

I looked through the loving, hand-sewn books, dated 1935, 1937, 1939, and in each one a fountain-penned inscription of gratitude to one Aunt Forgie.

"Who's this Aunt Forgie?" I asked.

"Oh, that's me," she said, bashfully. "There were a number of my nephews and nieces in the school, and they called me Aunt Forgie. And so then all the other children demanded that they be able to call me that. So that's how that got started. Would you like to go into the dining room now?"

I followed her inside, and we



sat down by a window with its hypnotizing view of the San Francisco bay. I was tired, the jet travel had slowed me down, and as soon as I sat at the dinette table I realized how much my body just wanted to sit there and look out, with this kindly old lady bringing me lunch. The converse was that I didn't particularly want to interview her about education. In fact I was a great deal more interested in the clouds and the cypress trees at that moment than teaching children. "You have an incredible view."

"Yes," she said, laying down a plate of toast. "Of course it's changed a lot. . . ."

I wondered what particular changes she was thinking of: she who had seen horses run up Van Ness Avenue. "In what ways?"

"Well, downtown they've just instituted a new driving system, with one-way streets. It's confusing at first until you get used to it. And of course, the construction," she said, without any trace of nostalgia.

"There do seem to be a lot of new buildings."

"Do you like sugar and cream in your coffee?"

"Yes, please."

She set an avocado and shrimp salad plate before me.

"This looks wonderful," I said.

"Well I had to make a salad because I couldn't both go out and cook!"

"It's very good, this."

"I beg your pardon? I can't hear too well."

"It tastes wonderful, this fish."

"Well, Easterners like Western shrimps. So I always. . . ." she said, drifting off. Or maybe I was the one who was drifting off. We ate in silence for a few moments. I kept wanting to lie down and take a nap. The tension of producing conversation with a stranger, more and more conversation, especially about classrooms which were so far away from us, began to make me sleepy.

"Would you like a bit more

coffee?" she asked.

"No thanks. Although I probably could use it. Excuse me, I'm a little tired."

"That's quite all right." Flora nodded slowly: her lips were pursed tightly together and she was watching me, more keenly than before.

I decided I had better start the interview in earnest.

"What year did you begin teaching?" I said.

"Don't ask me years. I never remember years."

"How old are you exactly?"

She laughs. "I will be ninety-one next month."

"You know I have to tell you, I just don't believe it!"

"You were probably expecting a tottery old lady."

"I guess we've been misled about old age."

"Well, one way to keep young is to be around young people. If it weren't for the kids, I'd be an old fuddy duddy up on the shelf."

"But the way you walk, for instance, and the way you move around, it doesn't seem possible that anyone over ninety. . . ."

"Well, I've been fortunate, you know. When I was eighty years old, they asked me to speak at a celebration. And I said, 'Well you know it's no virtue to be eighty. You just can't *help* it!' So I feel the same way about ninety."

"I suppose. But what does it *feel like* to be ninety?"

"Well—do you know the photographer Imogen Cunningham who just died?"

"Yes."

"She took a picture of my husband and myself. He's ninety-five; he'll be ninety-six. He's extremely active in public health. He's won all kinds of honors—federal honors that you'll see in the other room. Well, she came up and took our pictures last November before she died. And she said to me, 'How does it feel to be ninety? How do *you* feel being ninety?' And I said, 'Well, not very much different from what I always felt except I

tire very easily.' And she said, 'I just hate it!' She was ninety-three. 'I get vertigo and I hate—hate age.' Well, I think she hated old people too because the pictures that she took of us were so . . . made us look so horrible," Flora laughed good-naturedly.

"There is that whole grotesque strand in modern photography, where the subjects come on looking almost too defined."

"I know," she said. "You finished your salad? Maybe you'd like a little fruit."

"Fine."

"You'll now have another bit of coffee or not?"

"No thanks."

"I'm going to." She stepped into the kitchen to refill her cup.

"Do you eat any different foods now?" I called in.

"Do I eat? Yes, I'm on a very strict diet. I have been all my life. So. . . ."

Lunch was over, and we moved into the living room to the comfortable couch. There I asked her the usual questions: about her entry into teaching, and the development of her approach, the history of the school she helped to start, and the problem children she worked with. All of this Mrs. Arnstein was delighted to talk about, telling instances and details the way she does in her books. It was the favorite part of her life, I gathered. She offered particular poems and methods that had worked for her. The problem was that everything she said was so sensible, our values were so much the same, there seemed no point in discussing these matters. I had trouble pitching the discussion at a level where we could talk more as peers—where we could push the level of insight one step further. I was too experienced to play any more the acolyte hungry for tips, but too young to be an equal. All I knew was I wanted something sharper from the interview, and this sea of agreement wasn't getting me it.

Yet in all fairness, it was my





problem, not hers, since I had come to her as a *hommagiste*, gathering information to pay her public honor; and she was abiding by the rules of the game.

Mrs. Arnstein showed me an article of hers that had appeared in *The English Journal*. In it, she commented on the amount of poetry published recently by children on the subject of Death. The article raised the question, whether there was not something unwholesome about this phenomenon: Were children being manipulated to write on these morbid subjects? Or was the nature of childhood itself changing, becoming more cynical and sour as a result of global anxieties? She concluded by saying that educators and parents should make up their minds whether to approve or discourage this tendency. . . .

Something in the nature of an objection was bubbling up in me, but I didn't know quite how to put it. I wondered how, on the

one hand, Flora Arnstein could champion the free expression of inner moods by children, in poetry or otherwise, as a healthy outlet; and on the other hand, draw the line in so-called morbid areas like death. Was not that "protection" of the children another name for the repression she had always objected to, and that she had spent her life fighting?

All of us have our areas of dread, which often get projected onto children, in the concern of what to expose them or not expose them to. What struck me about Mrs. Arnstein's argument, however, was the word "wholesome," with its particularly nineteenth-century Victorian flavor. The only way I can get at this is to say it reminded me of Charles Reznikoff, the splendid old poet who died recently. Reznikoff was, like Arnstein, an extremely sensitive, modest, good person, born in the last century. He came once to read at P.S. 75 at my invitation, agreeing with a note that said teaching poetry to the young, "is correct, stimulating and spiritually wholesome." Reznikoff himself wrote gentle visionary poems about everyday incidents and people in the street; but he also produced powerful verse based on court transcripts of America's bloody history, in *Testimony* (not to mention his last, searing volume, *Holocaust*). He was reading to fifth and sixth graders some of his genial poems of the first type, and they were listening politely if drowsily to this small man who must have struck them as an odd sparrow-figure, pecking at words, when I threw out a suggestion that he read his marvelous poem about a Western gunfight in *Testimony*. "Oh no," he said fearfully, "I don't think that would be appropriate for children this age." I had to smile, knowing these kids ate up gunfights for breakfast. Somehow I coaxed him into reading it, and of course it was a great hit. They asked for more like that, and

he may have obliged with one or two more bloodthirsty ones, but against his better judgment. He seemed very much to want to keep an austere separation between the benevolent fantasies and the nightmarish ones, in his own mind, and especially around "innocent children."

From my reading of Mrs. Arnstein's article, she too seemed to be taking the position that childhood was a happy, innocent state. Though her books were filled with poignant observations about anxious, defensive children, she often treated their reactions as the exception. "How sad to burden a child with such baggage," she writes of a disillusioned boy, "when he might go out to life free-hearted, adventurous and trusting." There are references to "legitimate child-illusions" and "the carefree heritage of youth." She writes: "A cynical child is almost as great an anomaly as one with six fingers on his hand." I, on the other hand, had met many, many cynical children, and considered disenchantment to be part of the very music of childhood.

If children were sometimes lucky enough to be carefree, they were also fairly miserable sometimes. I explained this position, haltingly, to Flora—Mrs. Arnstein. I said that by no means did I consider happiness to be the given birthright of every child. Ever since Freud, etc. etc., people have been more willing to appreciate the sufferings of children, and not to lay on them the burden of having to be happy, which adults ascribe to children because they would like it for themselves but which has so little to do with the condition of childhood.

Whether I was raising this objection just to force a disagreement between us, or to move the discussion into darker, deeper waters, I don't know. I was worried now that she would take offense. I added that perhaps I felt particularly strongly this way because my own childhood was so grim.



Mrs. Arnstein sat thoughtfully for a few moments. Her old mottled finger rested on her cheek. Then she said, "You know it's funny that you say that . . . because my childhood was not very happy; I lost two of my brothers when I was still young. One of them I had helped to bring up myself—he was practically my child. Then he died when I was just twelve years old. I was shattered."

Her voice caught. I had the urge to put my hand on her and comfort this old, old lady for the loss of her baby brother. It had happened almost eighty years ago, but it was perfectly real to her. It was in the room with us. The sight of him seemed to be before her eyes.

She went on: "But I couldn't go to anyone about it. I couldn't go to my mother. My mother was too broken with grief herself. Besides . . . I came from a very repressed family. We didn't talk about those things. . . . I don't mean to say that my childhood was completely unhappy. It was happy enough. But it took me awhile to get over some of the bad parts." Again, her voice seemed to go dry. I was no longer surprised that she might be a little squeamish about death and children, or that she still had certain contradictory values regarding expression. The wonder was only that she had come so far by herself, in throwing off the mental restrictions of a Victorian girlhood. In any case, I was finally learning what I had come to hear. The story of her life.

Flora Jacobi was born in 1885, into a German-Jewish family of merchants in San Francisco. They were well-off enough to have a large house with columns and bay windows, and servants and nurses for the children. In their benevolently (and sometimes not so benevolently) autocratic, extended household, with the grandmother holding the most power, Flora was kept at a considerable distance

from the adults around her. Flora's father seems to have been a frightening figure to his children: sarcastic, teasing, silent, locked-up in himself, obsessed with neatness and daily rituals. Her mother was warmer, but distracted easily.

Flora was the kind of child who suffered hurts deeply. In the sensitive, honest memoir she wrote about her childhood, *No End to Morning*, renaming herself Amy, she is able to call up the feelings and embarrassments of an intelligent child who is forced to doubt her own perceptions because they seem so antisocial. Mrs. Arnstein writes: "One such incident occurred to Amy when she was very small, before her brother was born. The family had made an excursion to the Golden Gate Park, ostensibly, Amy was given to understand, for the purpose of 'ordering' a baby brother. They repaired to a little bridge overlooking a lake, and here she was instructed by her mother to ask the stork to bring her the baby. Amy clamped her lips. Something in the tone of the situation made her suspicious. 'Go on, Amy,' Mama prodded her, and finally to have it over with, Amy murmured something under her breath. But the grown-ups weren't satisfied with this, so Amy was forced to repeat the request aloud, whereupon she caught the exchange of glances between Mama and the aunts. What did all this mean? Self-conscious and uneasy, Amy felt somehow betrayed, and the consequent embarrassment troubled her for long afterwards."

Flora/Amy chafed against the prison which is the role of "child" (with all the naiveté and fond deception that that meant in a Victorian age). Yet her rebellion was so inward that it never seemed to reach the stage of fighting with her parents. She behaved always as a good, somewhat cowed child. One gets the impression of a girl who was not strong enough then to stand up to her repressive fami-



ly, but whose resistance took the decades-delayed form of vowing never to oppress others when she grew up. Her modesty today, almost a century later, seems not so much a consequence of undervaluing her worth, as a willed decision to be different from the elders of her childhood. Not overbearing and domineering, but accessible, unprepossessing, kind—Aunt Forgie. One has only to compare the portrait of her grandparents from *No End to Morning* (see p. 25), so arbitrary and God-like, with the kind of old person she is. Flora Arnstein today gives the impression of someone still searching to understand, to improve herself.

When she was a teenager, Flora fell in love with the piano. She left school at fourteen to study music. She spent three winters in New York with respected teachers of the day, such as Paulo Gallico, Rafael Joseffy, and the composer Ruben Goldmark. After several

years of study, she began to doubt, however, that she was good enough to be a concert pianist.

At the age of twenty-five she married Lawrence Arnstein, a member of her social circle in San Francisco. "He was the brother of a close friend, and at first I took little notice of him. But afterwards," she says with a twinkle, "I started taking a good deal more notice of him." Flora settled down, having two children and taking care of the household and continuing her music. The next fifteen years seem to have slipped by rather uneventfully—or at least when I asked for details, she couldn't think of any. "I was raising a family," she said, unadorned that. "You know, it's a funny thing. Both my husband and I had to wait till we were over forty to find the activity that would give us most pleasure in life. I waited till forty to discover poetry and teaching, the things I love best."

"And your husband?" I asked.

"He was over sixty and retired when he started his second career, in public health." Mrs. Arnstein called my attention to the photographs of her husband with various public figures, framed and resting on the bookcase. "He's still active as a lobbyist in the state legislature in getting health measures passed. One of the California hospitals is going to name a ward after him."

"But why did he start so late?" I asked.

"Well, that's a long story," she said uncomfortably, reluctant to burden me with old family troubles. But, as I indicated I still wanted to hear it, she went on. "He inherited a business from his father, and he went into business—which he never liked. He never liked being a businessman. He wanted to sell it off many times. But he felt a responsibility to the workers who had been there a long time—he didn't want to throw them out on the street, and at that time they couldn't find any other jobs. They had

### *On The Stylistics of Children's Poems*

It was something of a surprise in studying the children's poems to discover certain recurrent forms of expression. One of these which seems characteristic of the poems of seven or eight year olds is enumeration. A child will, for example, choose flowers as a topic, and then proceed to enumerate all the flowers he can think of. Doris (aged eight) writes:

*There are green flowers,  
And yellow flowers,  
There are tiny flowers,  
And great flowers.  
There are very, very blue flowers,  
And then there are little pink flowers.  
There are pictures of flowers,  
And flowers that children press—  
Like marigolds and things.*

Apparently the children, as an early step in the manipulation of ideas, tend to assemble them into categories. There are hundreds of poems of this type. One might be inclined to think that the children borrowed the enumerative form from one another, except for the fact that it appears spontaneously in each new group. . . .

Along with enumeration there occasionally appears some sort of evaluation or appraisal of the material. Appraisal, however, is encountered more frequently in the poems of the older than in those of the younger children. . . .

Another mode of expression occurring simultaneously with enumeration is that employing the words "I like" or "I love." This form is somewhat more mature than the catalogue; it implies a commentary on the material. It occurs at its peak in the eight- and nine-year-olds, and the "likes" and "loves" apply to everything, from sensory experience to contemplation and speculation. . . .

Reference to color in the children's poems serves two ends, identification and description. In the enumerative poems, color identifies objects: "there are red houses, white houses," etc., and is used descriptively in direct statement, such as "the clouds are white." . . . Subtlety of color observation comes, as one would assume, only in the poems of older children. Donna (aged twelve) notes:

*The warm sunlit sky  
Is blue with the color of endlessness.  
The soft brown earth  
Has the smell of the ground after rain.*

"The color of endlessness" is an inspired observation, and lifts the poem out of the realm of literal observation.

—From *Children Write Poetry*, by Flora Arnstein



been with the firm many years. So he waited. Finally, during World War II, he was advised that the manpower shortage was so great, because of the draft, that his workers would be able to find other jobs. It was the most opportune moment, and it might never come again."

Waiting is a motif in Flora Arnstein's educational books—not surprisingly, given the arc of her life—and a favorite strategem to be recommended to others. About one tricky problem, she wrote: "Chance played into my hands, as it sometimes does when I take time as an ally, and postpone action." Or: "When expedients as to how to handle situations are not at hand, I find if I wait, sometimes they clear up by themselves, and if they do not, and I am not under pressure to take immediate action, alternatives do present themselves." There is probably no shortcut to this faith in the wisdom of time to clarify confusion, so rare and yet so necessary in the weaponry of teaching; it needs the perspective of long experience, disappointments and rebounds.

When she was forty, Flora Arnstein's patience was rewarded. She had what seems to have been almost a conversion experience. One night she sat up reading Hughes Mearns' book, *Creative Youth*, about the success he had had in eliciting poetry from teen-age children, and decided that she herself wanted to try it. She stayed up that whole night writing poem after poem. It was something she had never done before; but once having made contact with that source, she found herself returning to it for months afterward. A curious thing is that she never played the piano seriously after that. Poetry had won her over completely. The little girl who whispered in *No End to Morning*, "Better keep things to yourself . . . better not tell too much!" had apparently decided to try another way.

The writing of poetry was cer-

tainly connected with the lifting of old traumas. At the beginning of *No End to Morning* Mrs. Arnstein places an epigraph from a work by A.D. Van Nostrand with the significant title, *Everyman His Own Poet*: "Only to the extent that he can understand how the past has determined him can the character be free of it." Expression is seen as an excavation of one's memories and inner moods and a first necessary step toward personal freedom. Thus, poetry has a therapeutic function, the bringing to the surface of the hidden life of feelings—a position which Flora Arnstein has consistently taken in her writing and her teaching. Her students' poetry and her own poetry tend to reach for a kind of lyrical cleansing. Humor, worldliness and everyday incident may be present at times, but they are subordinated to this other ideal, the pure surge of inner life.

One should not get the impression, however, that Flora was attracted to poetry merely for its purgative value. She loved the music in it. And if she stopped playing piano after taking up poetry, it was partly because she was able to transfer her musical inclinations to the newer medium. The first poems she wrote were, like Mearns' students, in rhyme and meter. Afterwards she switched to free-verse—though making sure to keep it strongly cadenced. "I prefer poems with cadence," she says, half-proudly, half apologetically. The sophisticated modern style she finally evolved for her poetry is scalloped, lean, dense, lyrical, compact, with rhythms that catch one up short, and metaphors extending from the interior toward the metaphysical: in a way, reminiscent of Emily Dickinson.

Flora Arnstein's involvement in poetry seemed to develop side-by-side, chronologically, with her interest in educating children. Dissatisfied with the schools in the Bay Area available to her children, she and her sister-in-law started

### *As if to escape light widening*

I shrink to the shape of my bones,  
But light pries, and like a brush  
Coats all the chinks,  
Probes through to the skin.

Shutters, shades, clenched lids  
Cannot smother it. It is like  
tyranny,  
Like fighting the air  
That never fights back.

Call to darkness from whatever  
crevasses,  
You get no answer.  
It is as though the earth never  
turns,  
And light has linked arms with  
you,  
To lead you closer and closer,  
Through rungs of brush  
Up to the crest of the pyre.

### *Doppelgänger*

The creature with the slitted mask  
Weaves up and down before me,  
Never a glance my way, but knows  
My hackle rises at each passing—  
His sure antenna notes  
My breath is footed to his step.

He is the discredited self,  
Whose journey is nowhere  
Except away, rayed from this  
pivot  
That holds him to a yard's end  
For sure return.

Neither the suave glove  
Nor hobbled fist stays him—  
My under-face, closer to bone, and  
nearer  
To longing.

their own school, the Presidio Open Air School. From its name it is clear that the founders had a belief in the educative value of children's play—although the traditional academic subjects were also taught. Enrollment was to be kept small, and the school was to be run along progressive education lines; and there was an energetic scholarship program to keep the place from turning into a snooty



private school.

What made the school especially unique was that it hosted a successful experiment in children's self-governance. Mrs. Arnstein and her sister-in-law had hired as their principal Marion Turner, an innovative thinker who had trained with the Deweyites and William Kilpatrick at Columbia University. Marion Turner's idea was to have children learn democratic behavior empirically—starting at five years old in kindergarten—by deciding their own code of conduct, discussing, voting, holding trials, and forming a school-wide representative body. "They made up rules about things of their own," explained Mrs. Arnstein, "issues that pertained to them: the schoolyard, and things in the classroom that disturbed them. And therefore it had vitality, and validity."

In her straightforward, useful book, *The Child Within The Group: An Experiment in Self-Government* (Stanford University Press—unfortunately now out-of-print), Marion Turner explains the procedure:

When a child found himself in trouble and needing assistance, I would summon a meeting of all the children in the group and, acting as chairman, call upon the individuals who raised their hands to say what they thought about the matter. When the sentiment of the class had clearly revealed itself, it was generalized in a summary by the teacher and voted upon by the children; a statement of the ruling was then hung upon the wall as an article of the constitution. A Chinese gong was hung in the room, and the children soon learned to use it on their own initiative to call a council meeting for the consideration of a problem.

In this manner, out of each child's problem there arose a formulated standard of conduct. When an offender listened to all that was said about what he had done, when he had a chance to state his side of the matter, when he heard what his peers thought about it—both those who would excuse him and those who were less tolerant—he knew where he

stood and why. As one of the children succinctly put it, 'You know the reasons for things.'

One of Marion Turner's most valuable contributions was in getting her board director, Flora Arnstein, to teach at the school. As Flora tells it: "One day Marion Turner said to me: 'I'm troubled about the music teaching at the school. If I get a person who knows music, she doesn't seem to know how to handle a group, and if I get someone who does know how to handle a group, she isn't well equipped in music. So the children are getting to hate it. In a moment of egotism, I said, 'If I taught them they wouldn't hate music.' To which she replied, 'I'll take you up on that—will you come over to school and take a class?' Without a moment's hesitation I said, 'No—I couldn't—I don't know anything about teaching.' And the matter rested there, until some time later when I told my husband that Miss T. had asked me to teach a class. 'You're going to,' he said. And I said, 'No, I don't know how to teach.' 'Well you go anyway,' he said. 'What can you do but fail?' So he pushed me over the ledge."

Her first classes were rather uneven. An amusing incident from those days is recounted in Mrs. Arnstein's book, *Dear Harriet*: it captures both her greenness and her stunning gift, even then, for hitting on the intuitively tactful, human teaching solution:

I came upon Harry's stubbornness on one occasion during a folk dance session. At large, on the dancing floor, with my back so propitiously turned as I played the piano, Harry was unable to resist the temptation for aggression. A swift kick to another child brought forth a wail, and a definite request from me that Harry take his seat. But Harry stood four-square facing me and refused to comply. I repeated my request only to be met implacably by the announcement that he wasn't going to sit down.

All this took place at an early

stage of my teaching career, when I was none too sure of myself. So here I was confronted with a child who I knew could neither be coerced, nor solicited into compliance, and surrounded by an audience of children, whose heightened expressions told me only too plainly that I was on the spot. To my added consternation, at this moment the door opened and my principal appeared with two visiting guests. To say I was petrified puts the situation mildly. In desperation I turned around all the expedients I could summon up, only to discard each in turn. Then suddenly, out of the blue, I had an inspiration. I played the musical signal for the children to take their seats and, as a matter of course, Harry had to take his seat with the rest.

Over the next few months, Flora Arnstein became more comfortable in the classroom, though she never liked teaching music. She was fortunate in having such a sympathetic supervisor and mentor in Marion Turner, who trained her as well in the self-government method. The facility with which Flora Arnstein handled it as a problem-solving tool may be evidenced by her own accounts of class discussions (see the Juan chapters from *Dear Harriet*, excerpted here, p. 17). And the freedom of children's expression encouraged in the political realm may well be connected to that which eventually came to flower in the emotional-literary realm.

Her major breakthrough as a teacher occurred when she decided to give up music instructorship and switch to poetry classes. This shift, in keeping with what was happening in her private life, brought the two pieces closer together and made her much happier. Eventually she was teaching poetry to every class and grade in the school. There had never been a poetry class in the Presidio Open Air School—nor were there, according to Mrs. Arnstein, creative writing courses offered in the West Coast colleges in those days. In short, there were no poetry classes for adults, much less children: which meant there was no way to

acquire a professional model for what she hoped to achieve at the elementary school level. She had to feel her way in the dark, groping step by step into unknown, unsettled territory.

It is this solitary, heroic effort that we pay homage to most. Working alone, her instincts proved sound again and again.

Consider her contributions. She was among the first to encourage children to write poems in free verse. She stressed the authentic, the personally felt, seen and experienced, as against posture-striking. She advocated using "the language of today." She appreciated and knew how to value the expression of child thought, child feeling, "pure child communication," whether it was poetry or not. She denounced the red-inking of poems, and argued that it was a mistake to impose grammar and spelling lessons on creative expression. She encouraged her students to edit and hand-print their own books of poetry (on multigraph machines), which were then hand-bound. She took dictated poems from very little children and published the results. She read children modern poems that were ostensibly above their level; she argued against introducing poems that were sentimental, preachy, arch, cute or "written down" to children. She made penetrating insights into the stylistics or recurring features of children's writing. She was the first to try to evaluate in a systematic manner the growth of poetic criteria in children. She spoke out against I.Q. tests and the whole machinery of categorizing and labeling children, before it was fashionable to do so. She involved herself in the problems of the school and the lives of children and their families, to such an extent that, forty years later, her ex-students still keep in touch with her.

From about 1934 to 1946 Mrs. Arnstein had accumulated a substantial amount of children's poetry, and a vast collection of

### *On Overpraise*

Often creative work seems to some people to call for a sort of special consideration—as though the mere fact of writing a poem casts some sort of aura around the activity. If the teacher does not overweight the writing, the children are relieved of certain fears surrounding it. . . .

Parents are naturally, and in some cases justifiably, proud of the achievements of their offspring, but in certain instances the expression of much pride is likely to place barriers in the way of the child. Matthew, aged twelve, instead of handing in his poem at the end of the writing session asked, "Would it be all right if I take my poem home first to show to my mother?" Not foreseeing any unfavorable circumstances, I made no objections. [He had written a poem called "News."]

It was a very acceptable piece of work, especially as an early attempt. But Matthew's mother was so impressed by it that she read it to a friend who was in some way connected with publishing and who suggested the poem's publication. Matthew's mother arrived at school the next day to discuss the matter. I advised her against taking such a step, but unfortunately the damage had already been done to Matthew. He had been made to feel he had accomplished something especially noteworthy, and as a result he became self-conscious about his writing. Whether he was wondering before embarking on a new poem if it would be "as good as 'News'," or whether in the writing the same idea obtruded, there was no knowing. In any event a long time elapsed before he could write spontaneously again. His subsequent poems were stilted and wooden. Overpraise, strangely enough, seems to block a child's creativity, and this is an additional reason for the teacher to accept the child's poem in a casual manner.

—From *Poetry and the Child*,  
by Flora Arnstein

insights into how to inspire such expression from children. She began to consider how to take this material a step further, and came East, to New York, to see what other people were doing in the field. There she was told by Nelly Sargent that almost no one was working with children in poetry—except for Hughes Mearns, of Columbia Teachers College. She met with him and he was instantly enthusiastic about her results. She showed him an article she had written on "The Development of

Poetic Criteria in Children," which told how she had recorded all her students' comments about their poems some time after they had been written, and dated the comments in order to indicate some measure of growth of poetic consciousness; and he got very excited. Mearns also urged her to write a book. Mrs. Arnstein objected that he had already written *the* book. He answered, "No, no, that was for older children, and nothing's been done for younger children. It's the hardest thing in



the world to find any material on creativity. I want you to write this book because I need it for myself."

Mearns also showed his enthusiasm for her storehouse, as he called it, by annexing a portion of it into his next popularizing work, *The Creative Adult*. Apparently he forgot to ask her permission; but he rectified the oversight later by writing a very gracious introduction to her first book, *Adventure Into Poetry*. In it, he said:

As a teacher and as an artist Flora Arnstein displays here her two great gifts: she knows the way into the inner spirit of childhood where lies unexpressed beauty; and she knows how to entice that dormant power into attractive self-expression. . . . Flora Arnstein belongs to that small but growing group of artist teachers who know that guided self-expression opens up important paths not only to cultural living but also to learning, to morality, and to health; that each revelation of the inner spirit thus successfully handled by adult guides has canceled at once a hundred personal and social problems of the faraway future.

There is some confusion about the titles of Mrs. Arnstein's books. The first, published by Stanford University Press in 1951 under the name *Adventure Into Poetry*, was later reissued by Dover Paperbacks under the more familiar name, *Children Write Poetry*. Her second book was originally titled *Poetry in the Elementary Classroom*, and published by the National Council of Teachers of English and Appleton-Century Crofts in 1962. This was later reissued, again by Dover Paperbacks, under the changed name, *Poetry and the Child*. The Dover Paperbacks have been continuously in print, and have sold thousands of copies—though Mrs. Arnstein says with good-natured resignation that she never made any money off of them. Dover bought the rights outright for "something like \$150 or \$500 apiece—I'm notoriously forgetful about figures."

I was curious what had happened to her teaching career and the Presidio school. "Did you stay with poetry classes right along?"

"For awhile I did. Then the principal asked me later on, whether I wouldn't like to take a grade. And I said yes; I didn't like this thing of being an 'occasional' teacher. I'd much rather be with the children right along. So I taught the grades from the second through the eighth. And I had no training except what I got from her."

"Now you were a regular classroom teacher? A 9 to 3? You had no certificate. . . .?"

"This was a private school. No, I had no certificate. In fact, after I left the school I opened an office for coaching children who were having trouble with their schooling. And I went down to the Board of Ed and they said, 'Oh, we're so glad. We need somebody so much! What are your qualifications?' And when I told them I didn't have any—any tags, they said 'Oh, we can't use you.' I said, 'Look, I've graduated children who are doing marvelously in high school.' But nothing counts, you know, unless you have a handle to your name."

"Why did you leave the Presidio School?"

"Well, after Marion Turner left, they had a series of principals, one worse than the next. The final one was somebody I myself was instrumental in getting to come out. Because she came from Columbia University, I thought, now that woman has had the experience and knows the whole Dewey approach. But when she came, she couldn't handle the children, she couldn't handle many situations. Things like this would happen. At lunchtime one little boy was burning a sweater out the window. And we had little children sleeping in the lower floor. The place was a tinder box, it was just wood. I went to the principal about it, and I said I think we ought to have somebody supervising the halls. I

said I'd be willing, and I'm sure the other teachers would be willing to take a day each to do the supervision. Well, she never acted on it. And there were a number of instances of things like that. Finally I just felt I couldn't be associated with it; it was just too alien to me. So I sent in my resignation to the Board."

"What happened to Presidio?"

"It still exists. . . . Under a changed name. It's changed ownership several times."

Mrs. Arnstein continued to conduct poetry classes for young people, ex-students, in her home. The sessions were as much opportunities for them to vent their feelings through group talk in a supportive atmosphere, as lessons in poetic craft. She also wrote a third book on education, *Dear Harriet* (excerpted in this Magazine), and two book-length memoirs about her childhood and adolescence. Her poetry has appeared in *The Nation*, *Poetry*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest* and many other periodicals and journals. Recently she brought out a beautiful collection of her selected poems, *Light Widening*.

At ninety-one she keeps writing, taking care of her fragile husband, Lawrence, and conducting poetry classes in her home. Her students are all voluntary.

"I have a group of adults that comes once a week. They come Monday nights. They range all the way from in their seventies to my granddaughter who's twenty-eight. It was started in fact by my granddaughter, who had been working with me as a teen-ager so many years. She said, 'You know, I never read poetry when I'm alone. And I think if we got a group together, we'd read it.'—Well, I said, that would be fun. So I tell them I'm not equipped, really, to do a teaching job such as a professor of English could do. I haven't got the background. I never had an orthodox education at all. So I tell them, let's just enjoy poetry together. And we do. They ask me

to pick out something, or I ask them: Who would you like to read next? And they tell me. I prepare a program, and have copies for each member, because we're all eye-minded as well as ear-minded."

"What are the poems you've been reading recently?"

"Oh, we've been picking everything from Yeats down to Carlos Williams, to—everybody. Anyone they pick, that they hear about and like. They were *very* enthusiastic about Yeats, and strangely enough they liked Edward Arlington Robinson, which I didn't think they would. But this is a very unusual group that I have now. Very gifted group of people. And they're not there to tear a poem to pieces. They're there to find out what they can like about it."

It had been a full story; I felt satisfied. But we had a little more time before I had to go. I asked what had become of some of her old students. Mrs. Arnstein grew alternatively fond and thoughtful as she spoke of each. Paradoxes

and reversals were what struck her most. A surprising number whom everyone had feared would not turn out well have gone on to brilliant careers in cancer research and so on, while some of the most accomplished students petered out. Not surprisingly, a good number also became writers and artists. One favorite of hers is a widely read syndicated columnist. Another of her pupils became a well-known politician and government figure. It is quite amazing to read the portrait of him as a child in *Dear Harriet* (where he appears under the name Juan, p. 17), with that double vision of his ascendancy in mind. Poor "Juan" was so unpopular with the other children, and so irresponsible and disorganized, that another expupil said, "We would have predicted him *least* likely to succeed."

She also spoke about one of her students whose life had ended in suicide. She said she had "never known a happier child." Mrs. Arnstein shook her head. Her eyes were focused in the long distance,

as if in wonder at the path of a human life. There is something almost naive, I started to think, about a woman her age still finding amazement in such a turn-about. But thinking further, it seemed that anyone who has lived so long, and has seen so many twists and turns and overturnings of human potential, must be either jaded, or awestruck.

Flora Arnstein has always taken the side of those who choose to be amazed and impressed with human growth. Herself a late bloomer, she asks again and again that the same chance of Time be given children who seem stereotyped as hopelessly slow or bad. Perhaps a little of the poet may be raised out of them. What she has given witness to, in her own maturation and in the careers of her students, is that anything may happen in a human life. An individual's capacities, either for productivity or for tragedy, are not predictable. As she phrases it: "The sources of human behavior are still a mystery to us. And so, no one has the right to say the final word about a child."



# Dear Harriet

Flora Arnstein

*Dear Harriet is unique among Flora Arnstein's books in that it concentrates entirely on classroom life: portraits of children, and the ethical and personal quandaries of being a responsive, just teacher, take precedence over the techniques of helping children write poetry. In Dear Harriet one can appreciate how deeply Flora Arnstein's pedagogy rested on her involvement with the psychological welfare of the individual child, the home situation, the vitality of the group, and the atmosphere throughout the school. This 'environmental approach' to the teaching of writing is extended even further, to the political and socio-economic currents in the air. The book takes place during World War II: and the war against Hitler Germany, and the defense of American democracy, with all its flaws, became real issues to the children, who naturally reflected the anxieties of the day.*

*The book was never published—owing, perhaps, to what was thought to be its limited historical context. In any case, we are proud to have the opportunity to publish for the first time here a number of chapters from it. The structure of Dear Harriet is a series of letters to a friend, from a teacher who is puzzled about her newly assigned pupils and blindly feeling her way—a situation that should be familiar to most readers.*

## LETTER XVIII.

### Ralph, "The Worried Child"

Dear Harriet:

It has come to me how little consideration we give to the effect that war, the existence of the atomic bomb, may have on children who manifest certain aberrant behavior. My attention was drawn to the matter by a twelve-year-old boy who was in my class at the height of World War II. During an arithmetic period Ralph complained to me that he was disturbed by noise and by his thoughts. I asked him if he would care to stay after class and talk with me—that perhaps if he talked about what was bothering him it might help.

He did stay, and the first thing he said was, "My head is full of war." He was worried about what would happen to him if Germany won or lost. He said, "I take this war seriously, not like the other kids." I said I could understand, that the war was a serious business, but, I added, maybe he was worrying needlessly. I went on to say that our leaders realized the seriousness of the situation, but were not afraid, that they had confidence in our resources, our skills, our men. He answered, "I get to bothering about the war, and then I wrap my feet around my chair, and I get more bothered. Noises bother me—the children playing outside, the table squeaking. I can't work then." I suggested that he had still to learn that we can't always have absolute quiet. He said that at the last school he had attended he had had a man teacher,

and "he made the kids keep quiet. I like men teachers," he said, "I'm used to them. I like them to be strict. I can't get along with women teachers; I don't like *them* to be strict." His man teacher, he went on, had given home assignments, and in class the children had only corrected the home work. I said I would be glad to do the same, except I could not take the time to correct his work in class since I had other children to whom I had to give my attention. If he wanted to see me before class, I would be glad to look over his work, and if he was too disturbed to work in class, I'd let him go to the library, provided he brought back his work finished.

He complained that his previous teacher in our school had "dropped my education completely. When I came here I was doing fractions and she put me back to easy stuff." "Well," I said, "maybe you feel that you need hard stuff. How would it be if we go back to fractions tomorrow?" "That would be swell," he said. "I think I'll get ahead with you. What I want to do is get ahead in arithmetic, get as high as the sky." What this meant to him I didn't know.

That afternoon he wrote the following poem:

*Hitler and Mussolini smashing at the Russ,  
Hirohito smashing at the Chinese and  
Americans and British—  
They want to get the world,  
But maybe we'll stop them . . .  
We hope . . .*

One might "hope" that Ralph's morning revelation had relieved him of some of his anxiety.



The day following our conversation he applied himself to his arithmetic with only a couple of outbursts of talking. In class he said, "I'm daydreaming again," so I told him to take a few minutes off and then start afresh.

He had been in the habit of barging into the library without apology while I was working, sitting beside me and talking, mostly about the war. I did not reject his visits for I wanted to establish a rapport with him, but finally I thought I should take a stand. The next time he burst into the room I asked him whether he had noticed anything when he had entered. He said he hadn't. I said, "Suppose you go to the door again and see what you notice when you come in." He did so but again said he hadn't noticed anything. "Nothing about me?" I asked. "No," he said. "What am I doing?" I said. "Correcting papers, I guess." he answered. "Right!" I said, "and what does that convey to you?" "Nothing," he said. "It might suggest that I'm busy," I said. "What would you say was the thing to do when you see a person busy?" "Knock on the door I suppose," he said. "In this case, that wouldn't be necessary," I said, "because this is the library and open to anyone. What else could you do?" "I don't know," he answered. "This is what," I said. "You could say, 'Mrs. A. are you too busy to talk to me?'" He immediately responded. "Are you too busy to talk to me now?" I thought it better to say I was, but asked him to come back a little later. In about ten minutes he turned up, and with a smile repeated the "formula." I said, "I'm still busy, but I like the way you came in, and I'll take time out to talk with you." He was quiet for a moment, then said, "This is the first time in my whole life I've ever thought of anybody else." I said he was making a good beginning.

He began to speak about a collection of war pictures he was making and said, "What is your telephone number? I'll phone you and you could come to see my collection at my home." I evaded the request, feeling that my relation with him had better be restricted to the school setting. He then suddenly burst out, "My mother screams at me so much that sometimes I feel like fainting." He did not pursue the subject, nor did I.

From this time on his class behavior improved notably. Only occasionally did he interrupt proceedings, and at one such time, I went over to him and explained how difficult it was for me to work individually with all the children, and that as he knew I did not willingly make things hard for him, I didn't think he willingly would do so for me. Since then his controls have been better; he works for longer stretches and does not make the constant demands upon me he previously did. He is not unintelligent, but extremely egocentric and undisciplined, however he is so responsive that I do not think it will be too long before he adjusts to school requirements.

Some of his special teachers informed me at one of our faculty meetings that he was not turning up on time in their classes. He seemed to be wandering around the school with no sense of responsibility for remaining with his group. I mentioned to him later that there was a problem I would like to discuss and would he make an appointment with me to do so. He wanted to talk right then, but I said that I was busy and would he set a convenient time later. When he appeared, after approaching me various times before the one we had decided on, I explained to him his obligations for being on time in his classes, and said I would bring him a little notebook and get his schedule from his special teachers. Then he could check with himself whether he entered his classes with his group. "I'll put a good mark for *on* time, and a bad one for *not*," he said. He hounded me until I had secured his schedule, and the day following the one on which I gave him the book, he came to me to show his entry. He seemed much pleased with himself.

A week later one of this teachers reported that he had been checking "on time" regardless if he was late, and what should she do? I told her I would speak to him. When the opportunity arose I told him I thought he had not quite understood our arrangement. "I could have told you," I said, "to have your teachers check you in, but I thought you would prefer helping yourself, so I left the matter to you." I added that I had learned he was checking himself "on time" when he was not. I said, "Of course we can't count this week, but you can begin again next week." He was disappointed and said, "Then next week you want my teachers to check me?" I said, "No, I feel you can check yourself now that you understand." He went off cheerfully, and at the end of the second week brought me his book with six late marks. He was waiting at the front door for me. I said, "Good, but I wonder if you can improve on that this coming week." "Yes," he said, "I think I can."

Ralph's problems, I feel, were of long standing. From what I gathered from his occasional remarks, his relation to his mother was not too good. She was inconsistent, at times over-critical, at others over-indulgent. In addition she had been recently divorced from his father, and this situation had no doubt played upon the boy's instability. His worry about the war may have stemmed from his own insecurity.

Aside from Ralph I ask myself what effect war in general may have on children—I refer to those children who are not directly affected by being in war zones, or having relatives in the forces. In the case of Ralph, he left the school before the year was out, and I never heard of him later. But his story has made me wonder how many children are carrying his burden of worry and has made me hope that we will cease to be embroiled in wars which threaten in one way or another all the children of the world.



## LETTER X.

## Ricky, "The Popular Child"

Dear Harriet:

Coming up the outer school stairs with Ricky this morning, I was struck for the first time with the thought how revealing it is the way a child enters the schoolyard. Ricky's greeting to the other children is a hand-wave and a cheery "How's everybody?" And of course everybody's response is an equally breezy, "Hi, ya, Ricky!"

The secret of some children's popularity is sometimes baffling, but not Ricky's. His every word and gesture give the clue: Ricky loves the world. He's not good looking, but his smile is infectious—he's not outstandingly intelligent, but he is capable and resourceful. Above all, he's a good sport.

For a time, though, there is a danger of Ricky's exploiting his popularity. He lunches in our room, where I preside over the children who have brought box lunches instead of eating in the cafeteria. "What contributions today?" he asks airily, whereupon there descend upon him everything from sandwiches to fruit, cakes and candy. He accepts all these graciously, though I do call a halt to the children giving him the more nutritive portions of their lunches.

At a certain point it seems to me that things are going too far, so I waylay Ricky for a little private talk. "Do you really like, Ricky," I say, "to be always taking things from the other children?" He looks surprised, "I never thought of that," he says. The next day he arrives with a large bag of candy which he distributes to his classmates, and from then on he never asks for contributions, and when these arrive unrequested, he limits the number he accepts.

Ricky's whole school career has been one of happy social participation, not only with the youngsters, but with his teachers as well. So that it seems strange when suddenly he is being sent to our room out of the special classes, music, shop, etc. "Something wrong?" I ask him one day, but he has no explanation to offer. How can he? There's nothing to tell him what is really happening. His teachers report to me he is noisy, disruptive and can't settle down to anything. In my room all I notice is that he is somewhat restless and that his work isn't up to his usual standard. He is distressed by this, but doesn't seem able to improve.

Accidentally I discover what seems to me may be the cause of his difficulties. His father, the school doctor, stops in my room occasionally to chat with me. I enjoy his informal visits—he is so genuinely interested in the children. One day I decide to speak to him about Ricky and an incident that had occurred the previous day.

In their social studies the group had been studying current events, which at that time were nothing if not dramatic. One of the children brought a portable

radio to school, announcing that Hitler was to give a speech and asked if they could listen to it. At the recess hour the raucous, passionate voice of Hitler was on the air. He spoke in German, so the children couldn't understand him, and one by one, their curiosity satisfied, they left the room for the more congenial atmosphere of the playground. All but Ricky. He sat as though glued to the radio, and since he didn't understand German, I kept wondering what was holding him.

I had no sooner mentioned this incident to his father, than the latter broke out in great distress concerning the predicament in which he found himself. He had left Germany after World War I because he felt out of sympathy with the Germans, had settled in America, taken out citizenship, married and reared a family. Now, with the persecutions taking place under Hitler's regime, he is besieged to send money, file affidavits for distant relatives and friends. He has already rescued close members of his family and has drawn all he feels able to on his resources, so that the continuing demands are causing him great unhappiness. "What should I do?" he says on a note of desperation. "I left Germany because I don't care for these people and their ideas, but now they write me in terrible need." He knows only too well the fate to which they are destined if he does not accede to their requests. I understand how torn he must feel as to his obligations and at what point he can draw the line, so I decide not to add to his distress by further talk about Ricky.

Ricky's disturbance continues. He is no longer the carefree boy he was before, and I am beginning to wonder whether his unrest is related to his father's. Anyway, here is another case where one has to withhold final judgment.

Suddenly Ricky changes—he is back in his own skin. I can't explain this any more than I could his other behavior. Later I hear that his father has had recourse to psychiatric treatment, and I notice, when I next see him, that he seems more relaxed. And Ricky is relaxed, too. His work improves, he is no longer dismissed from special classes, and we have our old gay companion back, entertaining us at our lunch hour with amusing stories.

Ricky, besides being a raconteur, is gifted in acting. When he was in the second grade, he was the star in the pantomime, *Jongleur of Notre Dame*. The scene in which he brings his only gift, his juggling, to the statue of the Virgin, and in which he finally dies, was so moving one could hardly believe it was a child acting. Later his mother told me that he hadn't the vaguest idea of what the play was all about, so that his sensing of it must have been a case of sheer intuition. \*

\* Ricky, now an adult, has become an actor and has taken the lead in many Italian movies that have been shown at international festivals.

Today he sits on the horizontal bars in the playground and calls the plays of a football game in progress. He imitates to perfection the radio sports announcer: his voice rising in tension at critical moments, varying the speed of his delivery, and offering the humorous ad-libbing that often accompanies sport reports. And in a play we are rehearsing, he gives a fine characterization of the hero, with a sure instinct how certain lines should be read.

Ricky is another example of the danger of characterizing any given child at any moment. Had one seen him during his involvement in the Hitler incident one might have been inclined to diagnose him as a basically disturbed child, yet when the source of his disturbance was removed he reverted to his earlier self—well-functioning, happy, creative.

## LETTER XXVI.

### Juan, "The Successful Child"

Dear Harriet:

Here is the story I promised you—of a boy I had in my class for five years. He entered one of my poetry groups at seven years old, being one of two children who could read fluently at that age, and later was in my eighth grade before he graduated to High School. But it is not because I knew him over such a span of years that I want to tell you about him, but because he is one of those youngsters who illustrates so graphically my contention that one dare not say the last word about any child.

Not so long ago I met one of his classmates, a newspaper columnist, now married and the father of a family. I asked him how he would answer the classic question: "Who in your class is most likely to succeed?" only in this case I worded the question, "Who in all our class would you have said was the least likely to succeed?" Without a moment's hesitation he said, "Juan, of course."

Juan's "success" has been so outstanding, that it is worth tracing from what an unpropitious start he attained it. At seven he was the type of child that invariably attracts adults. Sturdy and well-built, with the most disarmingly trustful expression, he drew the notice of every visitor to our room. Perhaps his attractiveness to adults played a part in the other children's distaste for him, for I have found that children feel in some way that the solidarity of their relationship to one another is adversely affected by a child's too easy adaptation to adults. However that may be, there was enough in Juan's behavior to have made him unpopular in any case.

Suggestible to the degree that he adopted as his own every story he read, every remark anyone else made, he soon drew down upon himself an impatience from his classmates that was evidenced by the disgusted, "Oh, Juan!" with which they greeted his

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remarks. In addition to his emotionalism (he was forever bursting into tears), his noisiness, and chiefly his immaturity and lack of judgment irritated them, so that he was subject to their constant criticism.

On the playground he was always in trouble—dubbed a "cheater," and the children refused to choose him for their sides in competitive games. It might be appropriate here to quote a discussion of the class relative to a stormy session on the playground that centered around Juan. Keith brought the issue to the group and chaired the meeting.

Keith: In the games we've been playing most people lose their tempers and say other people are cheating. This starts a mob spirit and a fight. \* People try just for points and not for the fun of the game. I do, too, sometimes.

Kay: It would help if we made rules before the games: people get into arguments.

Joyce: The way it is now, it's just loud noise, and the louder voices master.

Juan: People haven't any right to bring in new rules during the game. When people bring in new rules the majority side with them.

Keith: (accusingly) Juan, what were you doing? Making up rules! If everybody lost their tempers like you. . . .

Van: Suppose you don't know all the rules? Can't somebody tell them? . . .

Kay: . . . *You* may know the rules but if we don't we're unarmed. If someone told you when you were scratching your neck that it was unlawful, it would seem silly to you.

Keith: There should be some rule: People who lose tempers should be taken out of the game as a lesson.

Kay: Some people can't help it, others work it up to show off and so scare people. If you could only get at the source of things ahead, and prevent it.

Juan: Who does that! (lose tempers on purpose)

All the children, challenging Juan: Yes, who?

Juan: People don't lose tempers to show off.

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\* I had discussed with the group the nature of mob spirit, and they had become aware of what took place when this emotion was let loose. They were unequivocally opposed to its manifestation, and referred to it in a derogatory manner.



- Van: What would be the sense of that: Why should they do it to show off?
- Kay: I don't know why, but that's their logic.
- Edna: Can't we bring this up at assembly, that you can't lose your temper?
- Joyce: What's the use at assembly? It's our class that does it. You're never supposed to lose your temper. . . .
- Edna: I think the only way we can settle this is in a general assembly meeting. Other classes do it, too.
- Joyce: I think it is nothing to go into a constitution. Everybody knows not to lose temper and cheat.
- Kay: I think it would be a shame to the school to have a rule about cheating and tempers in our constitution.
- Jane: You should have enough self-respect and pride not to be put out of temper.
- Edna: Some people haven't the self-respect not to lose tempers. I used to bite when I was little, and I was kept in at recess, and gradually I got over some of it. I haven't got over all yet.
- Joyce: I don't know where this discussion has gotten to.
- Keith: I think it has gotten to a good point. You should not call people cheater if they don't know the rules. . . .
- Kay: Before we go on we should make a definition of cheating. A rule brought up in the middle of a game is not cheating, just because others don't know it.
- Joyce: Cheating is arguing when you do something unfair, just to gain your point.
- Kay: Lots of times when you're playing baseball a person says he was safe and just because the person on his own side agrees, it's not fair saying he's right.
- Joyce: There's nothing to be done if a person cheats.
- Jane: He'll always be chosen last in the games, nobody will like you or be your friend if you cheat. . . .
- Juan: I move that a person who loses his temper be put out of the game.
- Keith: There ought to be some rule about going after people—shouting, spitting in people's ears even if not hitting—some definition of temper.
- Jane: Just kicking a person out of a game is nothing. Letting them cool down and explaining will have more effect.
- Juan: I amend the motion to read that a person who loses his temper is out of the game the next day, and starts over fresh the third. (The amendment is voted on and carried.)
- Van: Suppose I lose my temper at noon, then I'm out only fifteen minutes.
- Juan: No, you're out the whole next day.
- Joyce: I think Juan's idea is a good one: starting fresh.
- Edna: Don't argue about it any more—you don't have to vote for it.
- Joyce: Edna, you often say that. Everyone has a right for discussion. If I want to get some exercise can't I play or does the rule mean just not playing in the big games?
- Kay: I don't think it's fair you should play any other game.
- Joyce: I amend the motion that you are kicked out of the big game.
- Kay: I don't think that's right. You've been kicked out for cheating and you shouldn't be allowed to play any game next day. It's as though a robber were put in jail for stealing gold, and then he was allowed out if he stole only silver. . . .
- Juan: I amend the amendment to read you can't play with anyone when you are out. (This is not carried.)
- Joyce: A person must understand what he is doing that is cheating, not just be told he is cheating.

There is much that would bear analysis in this discussion: the children's groping to arrive at the real issue, their realization of the necessity of defining terms, such as cheating, but I want to focus here on the result upon Juan. At the outset of the discussion

he was very much on the defensive: (it is all right to lose tempers), but as he gradually becomes aware of the elements involved in the situation under discussion, he is able to become more objective and fair enough to formulate a new rule pertaining to his own conduct. This is a spectacular enough about-face, and I believe it would never have become possible had he not been given the chance to see his conduct in the light of the other children's estimation.

The sum of the discussion was a clarification of several points: what constitutes cheating, what is fair (you don't uphold a person just because he is on your side in a game), the repudiation of temper, how to deal with a person who infringes the rule of fair play, and what is a relevant and fair punishment. \*

I think you will be impressed, Harriet, as I am always, by the children's sense of what is fair and what not. This type of (should I call it) morality is not something plastered upon the children from without. Ordinarily we do not place enough trust in the innate fairness of children. I have frequently heard adults say that children should not be enlisted to judge one another, that they tend to be unfair and vindictive, but I have not found this to be the case. If any one child, on occasion, takes such a stance, he is immediately overruled by his classmates, and it is the sober, steady children, such as Keith, Joyce and Kay who in the end prevail. In the discussion quoted above, Joyce's concession to Juan that his idea of starting afresh is a good one, goes a long way toward reinstating a youngster who has been in the wrong, and helps him to a new orientation to situations involving his personal behavior. In the instance of Juan, because of his impulsiveness, and the fact that the children were not too well disposed toward him, there was little notable change in his general attitude; but I think it is not too unreasonable to assume that the fairness with which the children treated him, and his recognition of the correctness of their position did play some role in his later development. \*

I shall write you more about Juan in another letter—this one is already too long, but I thought the content would interest you.

## LETTER XXVII.

### More about Juan

Dear Harriet:

More about Juan. Having dealt at some length with

\* This is the only incident I know of in the children's self-government procedures in which any penalty was imposed.

\* I have been in a position to follow Juan's career as an adult. He has manifested a marked ability to get along with people, to handle tactfully situations of great delicacy, to become very popular, and, as a final triumph, to achieve a position of outstanding trust.

his disabilities it is only just to speak of his considerable assets. These, however, are attended by concomitants which are not conducive to the furthering of his endowment. At the age of seven Juan was living in the period when Yehudi Menuhin was receiving great public acclaim, and any child who seemed to have pretensions to talent was deemed by his parents to be a potential Yehudi. In my own experience I knew of two gifted children who were exploited cruelly by their fathers. Juan was such a child, though whether his gift was sufficient to warrant his parents' expectations was open to question. In any case he refused to submit to exploitation, though he was required to make several public appearances as a "wunderkind." His resistance to being forced into this role took the form of daily fights with his father, who insisted on practising the piano with him every morning before school. By the time Juan entered our room it was evident by his swollen eyes and his general nervousness, that some sort of fracas had occurred.

That Juan had a certain precocity in playing the piano was amply evident. He had unusual finger dexterity and a prodigious musical memory. It took little persuasion to get him to the piano where he rattled off a series of Bach preludes with amazing facility. His playing, though, seemed to me a matter of manual skill only, as he gave no evidence of the music having any significance for him. A poem he wrote at the time will illustrate what I mean.

### *Pictures*

*There are pictures of everything,  
And nearly every people like them,  
Especially I. I love pictures.  
When I work my piano,  
I look at the pictures  
To make me express.*

The phrase "work my piano" seemed to me particularly pertinent to what Juan was doing. As for making him "express" I am convinced the concept was imposed on him, since at no time did I hear him play with any expression. Curiously the first time I had any inkling that Juan was genuinely musical was during our music period. I had acquired a musical score for piano which had separate parts for different percussion instruments. The children had been learning musical notation, and because Juan was already proficient in reading music, I made the mistake of appointing him director of the little band. But here again his immaturity manifested itself. He became so engrossed with playing the part of conductor, posturing, gesticulating, as he had seen professionals do in concerts, that he forgot to give the children their entry cues. They promptly protested his leadership, so he was demoted to being a member of the band. It was then, when Juan was playing the triangle, that I



saw evidence of his musicality. His score called for the lightest touch of the triangle on the down beat, and I suddenly became aware that Juan, completely unself-conscious, was swaying gently to the lilt of the music with that inward look one sees on the faces of those whose absorption in music is complete and profound.

It was all the more unfortunate, it seemed to me, that through his parents and music teachers he was being led into a false relation to music. We had been rehearsing a little operetta in which Juan was taking part. He enjoyed the experience immensely, especially those features which corresponded to what he felt was a "real" opera. One of these was the overture, and Juan announced that next year he would write an operetta for us to produce. I said that would be fine, and a day or so later he appeared with a score which he said was the overture to the operetta. When I opened the paper I noted that the heading "Sonata for Piano" had been struck through and above it was written Overture. I made no comment, and we repaired to the music room, where he sat at the piano and began to play. But he could hardly read the music, and after stumbling unsuccessfully through several measures, he finally gave up. "When did you write this, Juan?" I asked. With some evasiveness he answered, "Oh, a little while ago." "Who wrote the notes for you?" I went on. "My piano teacher," he said. "It was written as a sonata, wasn't it?" I pursued. He did not answer. "You see," I said, "a sonata is an entirely different sort of piece from an overture—did you know that?" "No," he said. "Well, you'll learn about that some day," I said, and handed the manuscript back to him. The fact is I was not even sure that Juan had written the piece as a sonata. Probably he had made up a theme or two and his teacher had doctored it up and written it out. This sort of dishonest procedure gave Juan an entirely wrong conception of himself and his powers. Since he hadn't written the piece in the first place, there seemed no more reason to him for not calling it an overture, than for putting his name to it as its composer.

Music, however, played a lesser role in Juan's life as the years went on. The daily battles, no doubt, wore his father out, as the boy grew more and more resistant to the prodding. But though he conformed in our classroom to what the situation required, in his special classes he was a source of trouble to all his teachers. According to their reports he was inattentive, silly, and spent all his time either annoying the other children or trying to make them laugh. In consequence he was continually sent back to our room.

Here he would vent his grievances, one of the most persistent of which was that he was discriminated against, in that he was never chosen for any school office by the children. He could not understand this,

and did not see that his behavior had any bearing on the manner in which he was treated.

One day I asked him if he really cared enough to be elected to an office to be willing to work for it. "I sure do," he said. "Well," I said, "perhaps we can figure out a way for you to get into the children's good graces." He was unable to formulate any reasons for his unpopularity, so I called his attention to certain of his doings that antagonized the children. "Would it help, do you think," I said, "if we wrote down a few of these things on a little chart that you could check from time to time to remind yourself of what not to do?" He agreed and thereafter for a while he came to me at the day's end to talk matters over. On the whole his conduct improved to the extent that he was reinstated in his special classes, but unfortunately he was never able to win over the children . . . his very eagerness may have stood in the way. \* His frustration at never having been chosen for either a school or class office also may have been responsible for the fantasies expressed in the following poems.

#### *I Wish*

*I wish I was a king with a golden crown.  
I wish I was a king with a very large throne.  
I wish I was a king and had a kingdom large  
With many people in it.*

#### *Thoughts of the Prince of Wales*

*I am the Prince of Wales and two score years am I.  
Yet I am king over a vast empire.  
My father is dead and the whole world mourns,  
Yet I am king over a vast empire.*

Towards the end of the year Juan wrote several poems which I felt might be the beginning of a reflectiveness he had never manifested before. Though it must be added that nothing in his behavior testified to any change in him, still the poems cannot be dismissed as of no significance. Apparently more was going on in Juan than was evidenced by his outward actions.

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\* During a class discussion of the qualifications necessary for the office of president of the school, on one child's saying, "A president should be popular—he represents the group. People won't respect someone they don't like," Juan asked, "What happens if a person goes through the whole school without being popular, but would make a good president?" To which another child replied, "How could you tell that he'd be a good president if he'd never held office?"

*Loneliness*

*Something is missing from my life.  
It makes me sad and lonely.  
I can't play, I can't think.  
My heart shakes in me like a hammer.  
I try to take my thought off it,  
But I cannot.*

*The dark somber night—  
It makes me feel the world is dead.  
Only the flickering of the stars is visible.*

*I decide to take a walk.  
I pass street-light after street-light,  
Then I return home—*

*But the night passes on.*

In a previous letter I mentioned Juan's assets, and here I must comment on his intelligence, which was of a very high order. He learned with great facility, had a retentive memory, and his interests were wide and readily evoked. History was his favorite subject, and in this field he read avidly everything that our library provided. In consequence he was far in advance of his classmates, when in the spring of his last year at school we were studying American history.

Here I must digress to explain the situation existing in the school at that time. When I first began teaching there, a constitution consisting of rules the children had formulated had been in operation for some time. But by now, all the children who had participated in the original formulation had graduated, and the succeeding group of children, who had not been party to the original plan, decided that a constitution was not necessary and proceeded at a general assembly to disregard it. I was somewhat surprised that our principal took no steps to forestall this action, but I learned later that she thought the need for rules would inevitably arise again, and that in any case the educational value to the new group of making their own formulations took precedence over continuing a procedure that no longer had any meaning for them. \*

Either because of our studying of the American Constitution, or from some felt need of one in the school, Juan initiated a discussion with the following remark:

I thought of this over the weekend. I don't know whether the others will approve of the idea. I move that all classes get together in their separate rooms and make rules to be voted on by the whole school, and then make these into a

constitution.

Though the drama of the situation may have constituted the appeal, Juan nevertheless had given the subject some thought, and this alone represented growth in him. I transcribe the meeting as I noted it at the time. While it took place in our room and not in the general assembly, the children apparently thought it sufficiently important to invite the principal to be present.

Kay: We've been getting along so beautifully without rules. The only reason for rules is if there is trouble.

Edna: Well, you don't need to vote for it if you don't want it.

Cary: It's never been brought up in a general meeting.

Kay: You could show us the minutes of our meetings and see whether we discarded the idea of a constitution.

Joyce: Nothing came up where we needed one.

Myra: It's like going outside of school territory. What do we need a constitution for? We take it for granted.

Kay: Still I think a constitution isn't a bad idea. The laws should come as needed, the constitution should not be made first. The president of the school should bring up the laws as needed.

Juan: When the United States started it had a constitution. Just because this school threw out its constitution two years ago is no reason we shouldn't have one now.

Myra: The government is different.

Dean: This ought to be brought up in the whole school meeting.

Joyce: Juan is right. If the U.S. needs one, we do. But we know the rules already.

Kay: For instance, what laws would you make, Juan?

Juan: I wouldn't expect to make laws myself. Everyone would make them together. The ideas of everybody are better than one.

This is a new stance for Juan, and also testifies to his growth.

\* See *The Child within the Group*, An experiment in self-government, by Marion E. Turner, published by The Stanford University Press.



Edna: It's not up to our class, but to the whole school.

Joyce: Juan brought it up. It's a good idea. If this class votes on it, it can be brought up in a general meeting.

Juan: Kay is right. Everyone knows the rules, but nobody follows them.

Kay: They wouldn't anyway, even with a constitution.

Cary: If you have no proof of the laws and have to go through all the minutes every time something comes up, having a constitution would be quicker.

Miss Turner (the Principal felt here the need for elucidation): There seems to be confusion about what a constitution is. The constitution is inherent in the minutes. It is just more convenient to see the rules in a condensed form. A constitution is the basis for self-government.

Edna: Then haven't we a constitution now?

Miss T: Yes, but not in constitution form.

Kay: Can the rules in a constitution be changed or thrown out?

Miss T: Yes.

Edna: This motion is funny. It is only whether we have our rules on a sheet of paper or not.

Miss T: The reason the old constitution was thrown out was because the children who had made it had left the school, and the new ones hadn't made the rules.

Kay: If we do have a constitution we should have it in a form that you can repeal certain motions and not throw out the whole constitution.

A motion was made to the effect, carried, and the remainder of the discussion centered upon the manner of presentation of a constitution to the whole school—in what form the motion should be submitted, and what groups should have the franchise. Cary ended the discussion with this caution:

Cary: We shouldn't go too far ahead. Our plan might be all ruined, but I have an idea they wouldn't throw it out. I move we have further discussions here.

Edna: We wouldn't be going ahead at all until we get the school's vote.

Joyce: Cary means we should not have any more discussion here until the vote.

Though Juan had brought up the subject of a constitution, he took little part in the class discussion, except for the not inconsiderable comment I have noted above, that he would not make the laws. It is of interest that the entire class concurred in the need for laws, and I take this fact as evidence that the children had come to some real evaluation of democracy, and realized both their privileges and their obligations in relation to it.

## LETTER XX.

### New Problems—Mark, Aggie, Jeff

Dear Harriet:

Here I am in a new setting which seems on first glance to present one large and overwhelming problem. By which I mean that while up to now I have always taught children from ten years old up, this year I am confronted with a wriggling and hyperactive group of sixes and sevens, in more senses than one. I know their activity is not unusual, but in contrast to older children this age child can deal chiefly in matters in which the teacher participates, which fact makes me realize as never before the luxury it has been to have children able to work on their own. These wrigglers must more or less have everything done *with* them, and that after soliciting attention at every turn of the road. Before you conclude, though, that I am not happy in the situation I must introduce you to my brood and, as is usual with me, every group I am teaching at the time becomes one of the most attractive I have ever taught.

Meet Mark: Mark is a tow-head, a stocky, hefty boy of six, of whom it did not surprise me to learn that his father is Swedish. Mark never walks, he never runs either. His propulsion is that of the breakfast cereal that is advertised as "shot from guns." In the course of his trajectory, Mark knocks down any stationary child in his path, disrupts games, and is death to static materials. His only social contacts are in the nature of provocations: he pinches, kicks, commits any act of aggression that occurs to him, and his inventiveness in this field is inexhaustible. In consequence after a week of school he is cordially disliked, which only results in prodding him to further aggression. My hunch is that Mark is hungry for attention, and that this is the one method at his command for obtaining it. Toward me he is docile, and except for occasional outbursts in speech and song, he is obedient and responsive. But his excess

energy is too much for him to deal with. Only when drawing is he relaxed, and then only partially. His drawings are all of air combat, violent dog-fights between planes, beneath a furious red belligerent sun. He is a coiled spring always on the point of going off.

Then there is Aggie. She is a spring, too, but a delicate one—a tiny wristwatch spring. Dark haired, dark eyed, sharp featured, she is constantly demanding attention. She has a wraithlike look, and her slim fingers are always lacing, plucking. She is afraid of the other children, is touchy and hovers near me for protection. No work holds her long. Her belongings are scattered all over the room. The clean-up signal finds her in a state of blank abstraction—she has to be called from play to put away her things. Altogether she is the most disorganized child I have ever known. She is also sophisticated far beyond her years. She entertains the children at great length about her parents' divorce, which neither interests them nor gains for her any status. What to do about Aggie? She needs building up if she is to survive the early dislocations to which she has been subjected.

In contrast to these dynamics there is Jeff. Not that Jeff is passive, but his nervous organization is apparently low-keyed, and to hear him talk with his slow deliberate drawl, one would be apt to conclude that one had a lethargic child to deal with. Woe to you if you act on that assumption! Jeff is slow only in speech and approach to work. My first glimpse of his fist-thrust attack on the stomach of his neighbor, jolted me out of any preconceptions. It might have been compared to a snake's tongue-thrust, nothing less speedy. His onslaughts are committed only when he thinks I am not looking. Except for these furtive outbursts, I would put him down as sluggish, and his facial expression bears this out. If ever there was a generic pokerface, that one is Jeff's. With large confiding eyes, and a steady glance of the most disarming candor, he lies deliberately though every circumstance refutes what he says. A couple of weeks with Jeff convinces one that here is a thoroughly amoral child, lying, stealing, and into every kind of malicious mischief. With all this, he is the most delightful, round-faced, freckle-nosed youngster, the sort that illustrators choose to represent the typical all-American boy. What to do to get Jeff on to the "straight and narrow"—this is the problem, but I haven't the vaguest notion how to deal with it.

## LETTER XXI.

### More Problems—Lila, Jimmy

Dear Harriet:

I think I left off my last letter on the note of Jeff, and I feel I ought to qualify what I said about that angel-imp. Lying and stealing sound pretty bad, but

we know they don't signify with youngsters what they do with adults. There's hope for Jeff, I feel sure, but whether I'll be the one to set him right, I truly don't know.

Meet Lila: Lila is the smallest, though not the youngest, in the group. Everything about her is round: her face, her eyes, her fat little hands, and her prominent little fanny. She is an American version of a Diego Rivera baby. Her interests are catholic, by which I mean that she is equally uninterested in anything that goes on in the classroom. So far as I can see, her only enthusiasm is for food. She appears in the morning with her lunch-box full of candy, and she distributes this with a great show of power. "No, Mark, you can't have any," and poor Mark's mouth waters as he watches the more privileged children. Aggie, too, can't have any, but Connie and Myra, the two largest children in the group come in for a generous share.

Lila reads like a flash, quite outstripping her contemporaries, so that it was with incredulity that I discover she does not know the meaning of anything she reads so glibly. Of numbers she hasn't the vaguest concept—any absurdity goes with her, and apparently she has decided to rule out arithmetic in favor of her virtuosity in reading. She is very gregarious—chums indiscriminately, very intimate with some pal for three days, then this one disgarded and a new one chosen. Well, she, too, is another poser. How am I going to meet all this diversity? Sometimes I'm near despair.

What would *you* do with a child who deliberately refuses to look at a book, just turns his head away? One can't clamp it as the old-time photographers used to do, and even if one could, what is to prevent his closing his eyes? This is one to "stump the experts." Jimmy is an attractive boy, with large brown eyes, erect posture, and a general air of physical competence. But he will try nothing new—perhaps is afraid of failure. Something about his sensitive mouth, his shyness, suggests he is too vulnerable, and apparently he protects himself by "not doing." I decide to let him be for a while, and watch for anything that seems to indicate interest.

One day he comes to me and asks if I have any book about knights. Of course I have none at hand, but in the library I find a beautifully illustrated volume. "Oh, boy!" Jimmy exclaims and returns to his desk, and from then on is not of this world: on page after page he copies pictures of knights, armor, lances, shields. I get an idea. "How would you like to make a scrapbook of drawings?" brings another laconic "Oh, boy!" and initiates an activity of long-spanned interest. At my suggestions he devotes a page each to shields, helmets, and the rest of the knight's accoutrement, and then, off-handedly I suggest that each page be labelled. He agrees, and I write the appropriate word at the head of the page.



By this time, Dick, another non-reader, joins Jimmy and asks if he too may make an armor book. The outcome of his request is more advantageous than I could have hoped. I invent a game. On tiny cards I print the name of each piece of armor, trusting that the headings on the album pages might somehow have been absorbed. Each card they "guess" (I avoid the word "read"), they are allowed to keep, the ones they do not, I keep. When the first guessing is completed the boys play the game without me, each in turn dealing out the cards—this competitive device providing two bites of the apple. Almost before I can believe it, the boys have mastered twenty words. At this point I introduce "slips." These are short sentences employing the armor words, and the rules of this game give a score of five points for slips as against one for a word. From then on word cards are scorned, even though we must have new words to complete sentences. Verbs, adjectives are painlessly injected, and then I have another suggestion. "How would you like to make a story of a knight's adventures?" Previous to this I have combed libraries and book stores for a reader on the subject of knights, but to no avail. Nothing of the sort apparently has been written. So I am reduced to writing my own text, and believe me, I have gained a new respect for writers of elementary readers. To make a story of even moderate interest using a strictly limited vocabulary is no easy matter. With our old strips as guide, I write one page, leaving the opposite one for illustrations. In the end, actually, a book of sorts gets written. And are the boys proud! They enter their book triumphantly on the bulletin board which displays the books read by the other children.

## LETTER XXII.

### And still more—Jinny and Carol

Dear Harriet:

I haven't introduced you to Jinny, have I? Picture to yourself a pixie child, blond almost tow-headed, except for a golden glow that seems to pervade her hair, her skin, her whole person. But she is no pixie so far as extroversion is concerned—she is withdrawn almost to the point of coma. A remark directed at her does not penetrate her retreat, and her previous school experience, if not a direct cause of her withdrawal, at least contributed to it, so that school has practically no existence for her. She is critical of other children, except for two or three whom she has accepted, I can't say as playmates, but as sister conspirators. Towards the adult world her attitude is one of complete rejection, and she implements this not by overt action against me, but by deflecting it to attacks on her classmates. She finds a ready accom-

plise in Carol.

Carol is perhaps the most challenging child in the group: Intelligent, strong-willed, and, as her poems show, in close touch with her inner self. By this I mean that she knows how she feels about things, and is acceptant of her feelings.

*When I like something very much  
They say it isn't good for me,  
But when I don't like something,  
They say it is good for me.*

Unfortunately many of these feelings are in the nature of protest, so that she initiates anti-social acts, and attracts to herself other children equally anti-social. Incidentally, she has been the last child in the group from whom I have gained acceptance, or at least a measure of tolerance.

I must tell you about an incident that occurred in the first week of school, in which the last two mentioned insurgents were involved. I don't think for a minute that they concocted it deliberately to try me out, but it was one which might easily have been so inspired. The first days with a new teacher provide the children with the temptation to see how far they can go and what they can get away with. They employ a variety of approaches that for sheer ingenuity would be hard to equal.

About the third day of school Lila comes to me complaining that she can't find her rubbers, and that she has seen Carol and Jinny moving a locker in the hall. I ask her to send the children to me. They arrive with that look of concerted resistance, slightly tempered by humor, which immediately conveys that they are trying to put the adult on the spot. I wait without saying anything, and Jinny is the first to speak. "We didn't do anything," she says defensively. "Lila seems to think you've taken her rubbers," I say. "We didn't." Carol's voice has a provocative note in its rising inflection, and says quite plainly, "What are you going to do about it?" I answer lightly, "Well, if you haven't taken them, perhaps you'll help me find them."

The children exchange glances—they have been checkmated and they know it, but I feel they think the situation is funny, too. "Come along," I say, leading the way. We repair to the lockers, the two culprits in a sort of huddle, obviously sparring for time and the opportunity to devise their next move, but stymied by my presence. There is a space between the lower lockers and the wall, a ready-made place for hiding things, so I ask the children to help me move Lila's locker. It is, of course, no surprise that the rubbers are there. With somewhat sheepish glances at one another, the two start to sidle off. "The rubbers couldn't have gotten there by themselves, do you think?" I say with a smile, and the

youngsters smile back at me. They know as well as I what the whole affair is about, also they are satisfied that I haven't made a solemn issue of it. Actually I believe the incident proved a turning-point in my relation to these children; they decided I was a "good sport," and as is paradoxically often the case, were rather pleased than not that they hadn't been able to "put something over" on me. Children, strangely enough, while enjoying harrassing adults in authority are often relieved when they come up against someone steady enough to withstand their assaults. \*

My difficulty in my present class is that I have no precedents to go on—I have to play everything "by ear." Also I am learning to take time as an ally—when

expedients as to how to handle situations are not at hand, I find if I wait, sometimes things clear up of themselves, and if they do not, and I am not under the pressure to take immediate action, alternatives do present themselves.

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\* I met Carol, now a practising psychologist, recently, and the following conversation ensued. "I sure was a hellion in school," she said. "Not in my class, you weren't," I said. "Well, I was in all the others, and do you know it's funny, I remember distinctly saying to myself at the time, 'I'm not going to be bad with her.'"

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These chapters are from *No End to Morning*, an autobiographical memoir by Flora Arnstein. Amy = Flora.

# No End to Morning

Flora Arnstein.

## GRANDPARENTS

The Family was One. It had existed from all time, it would exist for all time. It was one because it hung together. The members quarreled sometimes, but no quarrel lasted. To Grandma a lasting quarrel was the unforgivable sin. So everyone belonged to everyone else, everyone stood up for everyone else, nobody pulled away.

Grandpa and Grandma were the most important people in the Family. Grandpa was somehow imposing, for all of his being small. His forehead was not high, but his hair fountained up from it like fine spray, and his white beard flared out from the far sides of his cheeks. He looked a little like a picture in Amy's game of AUTHORS—with more beard might easily have been taken for Longfellow. Broad, unruly eyebrows pointed every which way, like tawny straw and under them his eyes looked bluer for having hardly any lashes. Though he held his eyes open wide, it seemed to Amy that he looked at things without seeing them.

Sometimes he was almost like a stranger. Alone with him, Amy could never think of anything to say. Once in a while he asked her to play the piano, but he hardly listened. The music seemed to unlatch something in him, and he would begin to sing. It was like the canary at home that sang as soon as the sewing-machine started. He knew only one tune—"The

Soiree de Vienne," which he sang a little off pitch, and all one level rhythm, so that Amy could never tell where the beat came. To please him on his birthday she performed the "Soiree" which she had learned especially for the occasion. The result exceeded her expectations. "Next Sunday you'll play it for the old people at the ALTENHEIM," \* he said.

Amy gasped. She had never played for strangers. Would she be one of the members in a concert, or would she have to play alone? She didn't dare ask, and Grandpa said nothing further about it.

All week she practised feverishly, not only the "Soiree" but other pieces as well. She had a little secret contempt for the "Soiree," and decided to reserve it for the encore—that would, she felt, remove it from the spot-light.

When Sunday came around, Grandpa called for her and Tottie, and they started on the ferry-ride across the bay to Fruitvale. Grandpa carried by its thick end a green cone-shaped parcel, unmistakably a bouquet. It was a warm day and Amy hoped that she would be able to wash her hands before playing. But as soon as they arrived at the Altenheim, Grandpa hurried them into the assembly hall.

Here on folding chairs facing a stage the old people sat—men with faces ridged like walnut-shells, ladies

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\* The ALTENHEIM was the old people's home of which Grandpa was president.



with skin creased like rumpled tissue-paper. They sat, patient and enduring, the heat pressing down on them, so that their motions looked wavering, like things seen under water. When Grandpa, shoving Tottie unceremoniously aside, led Amy down the center aisle, they turned slowly to peer at her, then back to one another, murmuring something in breathy whispers.

Grandpa with Amy's hand still in his, walked out from behind the side-curtains to the center of the footlights. From the height of the stage looking down, Amy felt as though all the eyes focused on her were one single eye, huge and terrifying, glaring in a sort of challenge, "What are you doing up there?" Her ears pounded like the breakers at the beach, and she thought she had never been so frightened in her whole life.

Grandpa made a little bow to the audience and pointed a finger at Amy. Then he ripped off the green paper from the bouquet and, with a more courtly bow, handed it to her.

Without thinking Amy made a step back. A fiery hotness rose within her, spread over her face, up into her hair, down her neck. How *could* Grandpa do such a thing! Didn't he know that bouquets came at the *end*, not the *beginning* of a concert?

She stood for a moment in a flurry, looking down at the bouquet, not knowing what to do with it. Then she walked over and placed it upon the piano. But in her embarrassment she laid it too close to the edge, so that as she smoothed her skirts to sit on the stool, the bouquet slid and dropped to the floor. Now what should she do? She couldn't leave it there, could she? She stood up, retrieved the bouquet, replaced it on the piano, when suddenly she became aware of a rustle of little laughs from different parts of the hall. They seemed to come at her like darts, and she shuddered as though each dart had found a special nerve. Had she too committed some dreadful faux pas? What a way to begin a concert!

Her heart thumped wildly. She parted her lips. She found she could only breathe with her mouth open. Hardly knowing what she was doing, she began to play, but fortunately her fingers somehow took over of themselves. It seemed a miracle that she was able to reach the end of the piece. She was so relieved to have got this far, that she forgot to acknowledge the applause. When she did remember, it was too late, so she went on to the next number. She tried to avoid seeing, out of the corner of her eye, the audience, some of whom sat leaning forward, hands cupping their ears—and especially one old man, bony as a goat, sitting in the very front row with a trumpet, like a misplaced horn, emerging from his ear, the wide end pointed directly at her.

After the encore, Grandpa came out from the side of the stage and kissed her. Then without a word he departed down the stage-stairs into the auditorium.

The old people crowded around him, talking and laughing, and some of the old ladies kissed him. Nobody took any further notice of Amy.

She stood for a while alone, still frightened and breathing hard. Presently she caught sight of Tottie, also alone, where Grandpa had abandoned her at the rear of the hall. She made for her, down the stairs and through the group still milling around Grandpa.

"How did I play?" she asked, longing for some word of reassurance. But Tottie was little comfort. Music meant less than nothing to her. "I don't know," she said. "It sounds all the same to me—like water running out of a faucet."

Amy turned away. The feeling of disappointment she had had in dreams, of arriving too late for something, something pleasant that she had been looking forward to, came over her. What had she been expecting? She didn't know, but surely not this! She realized suddenly that her hands were icy cold; she stood rubbing them, waiting with Tottie until Grandpa was ready to leave.

On the ride home Grandpa didn't mention her playing. Hadn't he liked it, she wondered. It occurred to her that she ought to thank him for the flowers. Heavens! She had forgotten them, left them on the piano. Perhaps it would be better not to remind him of them. Besides when she thought of that moment of presentation she went hot again all over. How could she look him in the face and say thank you for that!

Grandpa never referred to the concert again, and whenever Amy thought of it, it was like a tooth that you touch with your tongue to see if it still aches. For months afterwards even in the dark in bed, she could feel herself blushing.

The concert did nothing to improve things for her with Grandpa. On the contrary, when she was with him she tried to erase herself as much as she could. But he noticed this as little as he did everything else. How did it happen, then, that one day she found herself sitting on a footstool in the library and Grandpa standing before her reciting? Why, of all his children and grandchildren, had he chosen her for audience to whom the soliloquy of Hamlet was addressed? That and "Friends, Romans, Countrymen," and the lamentations of King Lear, Grandpa declaiming, focussing his unseeing eyes somewhere above her head, savoring the verse roundly, and looking at her when he had finished with a little air of triumph, as though saying, "See!" This was the beginning—later on came Schiller and Goethe, and it would have been hard for Amy to say which she enjoyed most, the recitations or the mark of Grandpa's favor.

Sometimes he recited poems. There was one, a little nostalgic French poem that made her uneasy. "La vie est brève/ Un peu d'amour/ Un peu de rêve/ Et puis bonjour" it went. When Grandpa came to the



lines, "Un peu de gloire/ Et puis bonsoir," tears came into Amy's eyes. She didn't want to think that Grandpa wouldn't live forever. He himself wasn't sad. He translated the poem into English, then into German, but Amy liked the French best, if she could be said to like it at all.

For special family celebrations Grandpa composed long poems. They were so revealing that they would have embarrassed Amy if they had been in English; but in German they seemed somehow impersonal—one could imagine they were by Heine. Generally they were addressed to Grandma, and Grandpa's voice grew unsteady as he read them. Grandma remained unaffected. All the while he was reading she had a little excusing smile on her face, but when he had folded the paper and sat down, she gave him two gentle pats on the hand.

By now Amy had outgrown her shyness with Grandpa, so that it was easy for her to ask him, as they sat in the library, "Tell me about the olden days, Grandpa." He looked up at the ceiling, took a few puffs of his cigar, and began as though he were in the middle of a "continued-in-our next" story from ST. NICHOLAS.

"Yes, I just missed being a '49er'," he said. "It was '50 when I came to California. Before that, in Nevada, I was a boy-of-all-work in a general merchandise store in a mining town. The people paid for their purchases in gold dust."

"Really, gold dust, Grandpa?"

"Yes, gold dust," Grandpa said. "I slept under the store counter at night with the gold dust bags under my head. One morning a bag was missing. I went to my boss. I was frightened; I thought he would be angry with me. But he wasn't." Grandpa took a puff of his cigar, flicked off the ashes, and, with a twinkle at Amy, brushed them with his foot under the corner of the rug. "After that happened," he went on, "I felt uncomfortable, so I left. I worked hard at all sorts of jobs and saved every cent I could spare. When I had saved the amount that was the worth of the dust in the bag, I sent it to my boss. I wrote him," and Grandpa emphasized every word with a down-motion of his cigar, "I didn't take the gold, but I want my name to be clear. I didn't have to come all the way from Germany to be a thief."

He stopped and looked at Amy, as though he expected her to say something; but she didn't know what to say. It was a nice story and there was a point to it, she felt sure, but she couldn't at the moment decide what it was. "Tell me some more," she said.

Grandpa smiled and looked again at the ceiling, as though his memories were written there for him to read. "Well, let's see," he said. "You know, when your Grandmother and I were young, our only amusement was to go for a walk on Sunday afternoons. There never was a time when I didn't have a baby on my arm." This was hardly surprising to Amy,

considering that Grandpa had had eleven children. Actually, Amy knew only ten, but that was because Solly, the eldest, had died when he was a child. "Of brain fever," Mama said. "He was too bright. After that," she said, "Grandpa never took any interest in his other children. Solly had been his pride."

Amy remembered that she had never heard anyone in the family mention brains. Perhaps, she thought, they didn't approve of people having them.

Grandma was as important in the family as Grandpa, maybe even more so. Her children called her "Ma," and obeyed her without question, which seemed strange to Amy, since they were grown-ups of whom obedience is hardly expected. She was the most loving person, the same to her children, their husbands and wives, and all the grandchildren.

Every Sunday morning, regular as the week came around, the grandchildren visited her, dressed always in their best clothes. Amy was supposed to wear her Sunday hat and coat, though Grandma lived only just across the street from her, cater-corner, and on week days she ran from house to house however she happened to be dressed.

Grandma would be sitting crocheting in the dressing room off her bedroom. She had on a black challis wrapper, all-over bright sprigs of flowers, with a ruffle of lace at throat and sleeve-end. Beside her on the sofa was her workbasket, bulging with dexter cottons and crochet hooks of all sizes; and here she kept the special purse that held the nickels each child was given for pin-money—a nickel a child. Sometimes Amy sat with her while the other children went outdoors to play, and once Grandma asked her to read aloud from her favorite paper, "Die Gartenlaube."

What a thrill to be singled out this way! Amy seated herself on the footstool at Grandma's feet, flattened her skirts under her, and followed Grandma's finger to the place where she was to begin. In her best German, and feeling very important, she began to read, being especially careful of the pronunciation of the 'ch's' and the "Umlauts." When she had finished the page, she looked up, anticipating the words of praise she was certain would follow. She could hardly believe it when Grandma said, shaking her head, "Child, you have a terrible accent!" But Grandma didn't mean anything by that, because she was really kind to everybody, except, perhaps, to Mr. Fongy, the vegetable man. One time, Mama said, she scolded him so harshly for sending her some wilted lettuce, that he fainted dead away.

From the dining-room window of her own house Amy watched Grandma on Saturday mornings, as she walked down the hill on her way to Temple. Her black broad-cloth cape was sewn all over with tiny jet beads, and it had standing-up sleeves on top—that weren't sleeves really at all, for her hands came out of slits in the side. A little bonnet trimmed with purple



violets was tied by a bow under her chin. The bonnet sat up high, just behind her pompadour, which was dark and thick except in places where the rat showed through. She walked always the same way, one hand bent at the wrist, bunching up her skirt behind to keep it from brushing along the side-walk. In the other hand she carried a little black prayer-book that glinted gold along the edges of the pages. Her white gloves were too tight and puckered up the skin in the round opening beneath her palms. Someone always had to button them for her.

Once in a great while Amy accompanied Grandma to Temple. The service, with the ritual of standing up and sitting down, the alternate responses of rabbi and congregation, and the rabbi's sermon, which seemed to her to be mostly scolding . . . what was it all about?

The rabbi was a tall man with hair slick as shoe-polish, until it narrowed into thin strips at the sides of his ears, where it curled into a mesh like the stuffing of a mattress. Farther down his beard burst out sideways from his chin into two angry points. His eyes were stiff as an eagle's, and, when he spoke, he turned sharply and aimed a sudden finger first at one person and then at another. His look was like a stab. He terrified Amy so that she tried not to watch him, but she kept having to in order to make sure his eyes weren't stabbing at her. Whenever he was most severe, the people nodded their heads. It was as if they enjoyed the scolding, for, on their way out when the service was over, and they stopped and greeted one another, they would say, "Wonderful sermon!"

But the music Amy liked, except that it didn't seem solemn enough. Sometimes the singing was even gay, and the organ thumped out tunes that made her think of parades rather than of religious things. Nobody mentioned this—she guessed they liked it that way; and they never seemed to mind, either, the moany songs the cantor was always breaking in with.

On the Holy Days, especially on Rosh Hashona, it was a family custom for the children, each in turn, to be brought to Temple. It was a sort of respect they paid to Grandpa and Grandma. The visits were only of short duration, and Amy always hoped her turn would not come during the "Mourner's Service" or the blowing of the Shofar. When the mourners stood up, Amy had to turn away—she could not bear to see the tears on Mama's face.

The Shofar was something else. It was a ram's horn, and was blown from the altar. The sound was not like that of any instrument Amy had ever heard—a blast, like a stupendous burp, explosive and without timbre. The worst of it was, it struck her as irresistibly funny. It caught her in the pit of her stomach, no matter how much she stiffened in advance to prepare herself. Before that, in the silence which preceded it, she grew more and more nervous, until as the moment neared, panic seized her that she

would not be able to control her laughter. With handkerchief wadded against her mouth, she braced herself against the back of the pew, and held her breath as she watched the player mount the altar steps and lift the Shofar to his lips. The struggle was a horrible ordeal—to have laughed would have disgraced her, and reflected on Grandpa and Grandma as well. How she survived she never knew; something inside her stopped at the first assaulting sound, as though she had actually been stunned by a blow.

Every year as the Holy Days approached, she suffered in anticipation: would she or wouldn't she have to be present at the sounding of the Shofar? But since she never told anyone her fears, she never knew in advance whether she would be spared this part of the service.

Earlier, when she had walked down the aisle to Grandpa's pew, Grandma had moved over to make room for her and had taken her hand in her usual gentle way. But now there was something different about her, something a little remote that seemed to say, "I'm not only your Grandma." She would reach for one of the prayer-books in the rack on the pew ahead, and turn the pages to find the place in the service for Amy to follow. Then she would seem to leave—as though she were retiring into some place where Amy might not follow. Left to herself, Amy was never sure whether she was supposed to join in the responses, so she compromised by moving her lips without sounding the words.

She kissed Grandpa and Grandma when her time was up, and one of the other children came along to relieve her. But out in the street she opened her mouth and took in long and grateful breaths of the cool air. The daylight and sunshine, sweet and familiar, after the heavy-laden subdued light of the temple, flowed comfortingly around her. Rosh Hashona was something to be forgotten until next year.

What was there about Grandma that made her different from everybody else? Amy could never discover. When her children said, "Ma," or any of the grandchildren, "Grandma," it was as though they were saying something a little like "Amen," something solemn that said, "This is everything."

Not that Grandma was solemn. Her laugh, explosive and warm, delighted Amy: the sudden burst that threw her head back, the chuckle that followed, and finally the tears, so that she had to take her glasses off and wipe them. Amy remembered Grandma's laugh longer than anything else about her, together with something that "goodness" seemed too light a word for. It was difficult to define, but, as Amy grew older, a thought came to her that seemed nearest to explaining Grandma, fantastic though she knew it to be: Grandma was like the hills and the sea—she was sort of everlasting.



## AND THERE WAS TONY

Tony was the youngest of the Eastern cousins, and "Tony" wasn't his name. But that was what everyone called him. To every member of the family it meant something different, because with every aunt and uncle and cousin he was a different person, not through dissembling, but because with each he shared little private sayings and jokes that belonged only to the two of them.

He was slender and small-boned, with eyes too large for his face, and lids that looked sleepy, and a soft mouth holding in a smile. And he loved everybody and everybody loved him—only Amy wanted him to love her the most. Nobody but she knew how "special" he was, with his long brown hands caressing the keyboard, the hands that melted when she held them, as though they had no bones. Nobody but she knew (because nobody in the Family cared about music) how "special" he was in this—picking out tunes on the piano—anything he had ever heard, playing them as though he were making them up himself, out of his own head. Oh, yes, he did that, too—make up things—little marches and songs for birthdays, the notes written in a round owlsh script, and the dedication in bold fat letters at the top of the page.

For hours and hours he sat at the piano, his fingers wandering among the keys as though looking for tunes, for happy chords that floated one into another, for little runs, like children in and out of sun and shade, and for the rolled arpeggios that tumbled like seashore waves. But he jumped up whenever the children appeared—always ready for play.

"I'm Hector, Danny, you be Achilles." Out into the garden, stopping by the kitchen for sauce-pans to serve as helmets, raiding the basement for garbage-can lids for shields. "Oh, Zeus," Tony stood on the lawn, his eyes raised aloft, "grant me victory over my enemy!" Broomsticks clashed on garbage lids, prayers and imprecations filled the air, the odds went first to one hero, then to the other—no mightier battle was ever fought!

All summer long Tony joined in the games, running from Grandma's house, where he slept, across the street to Amy's where he spent most of his waking time. When Amy's family took off for the country, Tony was always with them, rooming with Danny. At the seashore, after Amy had read them stories of the Wagner operas, Tony climbed the rocks, and with hand shading his eyes, hailed the "Flying Dutchman" sailing the California coast. Siefried and Hundig (he and Danny) wound their horns from behind an abandoned jetty, or standing on the beach invoked the Rhine Maidens sporting in the great shore breakers.

As the years went on, the difference in age between Tony and Amy (she was five years his senior) seemed to lessen. Five years is a good span of time in the life of a child, but Tony was no ordinary child. It was not long before he was abreast of Amy in music, playing the same pieces, trading records, arguing furiously over the merits of their preferred composers. He, who was so gentle and complaisant with every one else, would concede her no inch. Something told him that she would dominate him if he allowed her to do so. Always quick-tempered, he became explosive in argument, and arguments led to quarrels. He forgot them as soon as they were over, but Amy brooded over them at night, and tossed in bed rehearsing what each of them had said. It was bad enough to differ from him, but to have him angry with her and think less of her—that was hard to bear.

Because she had such dreams for him, he was to be a great musician, a famous pianist. She pictured him walking across the stage (somehow, paradoxically, he was still a little boy, with his hair always too long and tousled, and wearing his baggy knickers) and she watched him sit at the piano, lift his long brown hands, and drop them on the keys with the tenderness that made the overtones echo like songs heard distantly over the mountain lake. She could see the audience, at the concert's end, rise of one accord, stand and clap till the hall was one great clamor, the "bravo's" the "encore's" resounding into the wings. And he, alone on the stage, small and modest, and looking surprised as he always did when anyone praised him.

Even now, when, with his back to the piano, he sang out the notes Amy struck, or called the chords—one note above the other—he brushed aside her praise with, "Oh, it's nothing. Anyone can do it."

Music was no solemn matter to him as it was to Amy, who hugged it fiercely to herself and admitted only a few, perhaps Papa and Tony alone, into the hallowed sanctuary. Merry and lighthearted, Tony took his music as he did everything else: seriously if there was work to be done, lightly, if there was not. It grew, of course, to be his life interest, but for him it was never a thing apart—always a bond to people, a pleasure both in solitude and when shared, and a commitment to high endeavor, a dedication when he was alone.

Amy loved and envied him. He was everything she was not: gifted and gracious, easy and generous, and, in her own tight and shy withdrawal, fretted by a conscience that shut her off from whatever impulses might have brought her release, she saw in him the ideal of what a person might be. Not that he ceased being a little boy, distressing her sometimes with his clumsy humor, his irrepressible giggle. He was always the two; and though in their common interest in music she felt him close and contemporary, at other times he was elusive, a cool, little detached creature,

with, toward her, she felt, "the hard heart of a child." This grieved and saddened her, but for all that he was still Tony, and that was enough for anyone to be.

The summer eventually drew to a close, and the Eastern cousins assembled their gear, said their good-byes. Tony packed his personal satchel (the envy of

the other children, whose belongings were always stowed away anonymously in Mama's voluminous black trunk) and the day of departure came. There were no sad farewells; all knew they would meet next year, and Amy and Danny settled down to the winter round. And for Amy school began again.

#### FOUR POEMS BY FLORA ARNSTEIN

##### Against the dark

Stand over against the dark,  
There is still light enough to see.

Why must I read forecasts in you,  
Not clock my own? Was it in sleep  
I willed away my weather? Now I am rooted  
Like a sundial that angles time  
Only in your presence.

##### You speak

as if *never* were a place  
One could find or leave—  
Finger-marks below the lock  
To tell you had been there.

But never is not a place,  
Not an opening nor a closing,  
Or even a key-hole to breathe through.

I know the never—from my lungs,  
From the cold that drips from my thumbs.  
It is a thrust, at once in and out,  
Like air on the wet and dry side of a window.

I beg it to leave off grasping,  
Take the shape of its fingers off my ears,  
Cease prying into my sockets,  
Let my furrows ride,  
Till I taste the ocean,  
Till the salt leavens my tongue.

##### For M.E.T.

You are unanswerable:

Filament of summer,  
A shell whorl,  
A submerged footprint  
In the outdrifting tide,  
A grape vine grappling,  
Trees, twigs, temples . . .

Because of shade and shadow,  
Promise of no promises,  
Because in this inch of time  
You begrudge no breath,  
Because before you I am a pilgrim  
Who worships and departs,  
His cup empty, but with a ringing of bells.

##### The Swan

There is that motionless motion of the swan,  
Level on the water—  
A going that but for the wake  
Is no going, as though the water  
Propelled, and the swan, still and acceptant,  
Balanced its whiteness, turning its head  
On the limpid stem  
To note what grosser eyes can never see.

What is this otherness, this whiteness,  
This repose?



## APPENDIX K





"The magazine has been of inestimable help to poetry, and to poets in inspiring confidence in themselves and their work in this country." *Langston Hughes*

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POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

## SIX POEMS

## COMMUNICATION

Out of cool mystery I write you,  
 Out of the things that have never been before,  
 Out of the things that have always been.  
 I bring you no revelations,  
 No woven weathered creeds  
 To wrap about your naked unbelief;  
 No patterned scarves,  
 To shield your eyes  
 Or mitigate the unendurable;  
 No solaces, tender-fingered;  
 No promises, light-shot.

What I have won is not for you:  
 Hardness striking upon bone,  
 Shaping new contours;  
 Sharpness cutting flesh,  
 Molding new surfaces;  
 And that resiliency which only death defeats,  
 And pliancy which life alone creates—  
 How can I bring you these?

Out of cool mystery I write you  
 All this—the incommunicable.

*Flora J. Arnstein*

ONLY THE DOME

Only the dome, man-made,  
Borrows the curve of hills;  
The houses stand square-shouldered,  
And uptiered buildings launch rigid rockets at the sky.

Only the dome follows the curve of hills.  
Man is not yet  
Coördinate with the flexile arc;  
His the line, the astringent steel,  
The acid angularity of stone.

PLOWING SONG

Turn, loam, your sodden waves,  
Turn to the sun your crestless brown,  
That the plow may carve its somber swath  
Where the steel cuts down.

Turn, loam, to the rain, the air;  
Let the tread of the gat-toothed harrow speed  
The readiness, the earth-resolve  
That invites the seed.

FISHES

Fishes put to shame all other motion;  
Even birds in flight  
Have not their fine mercurial flow,  
Their swift recoil, their supple pliancy.

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

They are water's self made manifest  
 In quaint, bizarre, and unimaginable forms.  
 Fishes are like dreams—  
 Inconsequential, fleeting, and at times  
 Obscure and yet alive with sharp intent—  
 Subtle and volatile and strangely wise.

## GIFTS

Bring me no lasting gifts—I must  
 Be quit of gifts for good,  
 Who have too often prisoned love  
 In gems and carven wood,  
 Only to find that virtue ebbs  
 Surely from hoarded thing.  
 So make me only gifts that brush  
 To dust, like a moth's wing.

## KNOWING NO MORE

Knowing no more of life than can be seen  
 In the short moment of the kindling eye,  
 Nor more of death than can be held between  
 Two hands that folded lie,

I am absolved of ultimates. The wing,  
 So neatly jointed that the bird laps under,  
 The passion-flower's jewelled pencilling—  
 These are enough for wonder.

*Flora J. Arnstein*



## APPENDIX L

1520 Willard Street  
San Francisco, CA 94117

May 8, 1984

My very dear Forgie:

I return your note on the quality of social life in the days of THE QUEEN, and the strict adherence to the rituals which families, especially adolescent daughters, followed religiously. I must say you arouse nostalgia, writing it all down, and I will tell you one day about a High Tea I was treated to when I was once a guest in an Irish castle in Dublin.

If you had been having a go with the literary gentry in Victorian England, let's say -- having Tea with Lady Gregory and some of her guests - Oscar Wilde, Mr. Whistler, probably Lady Windermere - (the records of the 19th C. Novels indeed seem to be documentaries). You would recognize the thin cucumber sandwiches which Wilde describes so lovingly, with a smidgen of freshly imported caviar from Russia (Beluga caviar - surely there is no better even today - ), just a bit dropped on a tiny bit of crisp lettuce - the drop that activated all the senses, and never to be forgotten... The delicious gossip that inevitably was a certain part of the ritual of serving Tea. I must bring you a copy of a book I have somewhere

in my library = The Other Victorians ... They seem an entirely different breed.

Certainly your own archive of the "Events" of the life in your own family are chronicled as accurately as those you record in your letter to me, and I should quite certainly suspect that some young thing of 98 years will one day run across your records, have the same reaction - and say to a friend many years hence, "After all,



nothing changes - not really".

We may all be sitting around a table somewhere in the future watching the enactment of that Tea Party scene and recall this one as I do.

In any case, obviously I enjoyed your letter immensely and thank you for letting me see it. The rest of our company should really be allowed to see a copy of it. I hope you will circulate it.

With much love to you,

Ruth



I have been reading a spate of 19th century English novels, and I feel as though I had been swimming in a sea of tea. It seems no mov~~e~~l is without its tea/time--many tea times--Actions and meetings occur then--the essential time and place<sup>in which</sup>/they should occur. Out on the terrace in fair weather, the tea-service carried by a man or maid servant; indoors, in inclement weather. It is a ritual, fixed as an object in nature, sun or rain. And the ritual must be learned: a young girl is taught to "pour," to sense the moment of readiness--it is no idle gesture. Large slabs of buttered bread are always evident, and all sorts of jam.

Then there are the bells--one to dress for dinner, one to appear suitably garbed.

2.

There is the inevitable "joint" already carved Below stairs, and "trifles" (whatever they may be) for dessert; treacle, too, at appropriate times. The withdrawal of gentlemen after meals, another ritual- the ladies remaining behind, their purity spared by not having to listen to their husbands' bawdy jokes.

Breakfasts--another ritual-- At country homes, guests descend to the dining room at their pleasure. All edibles are under "cloches"--~~The~~ guests spoon their choices, and while ~~me~~ials abound, these stand behind the diners, their only function being to remove empty plates.

Rose gardens are de rigeur. Hosts escort ladies on leisurely tours.

While still in the country homes we must remember the "hunts"--horses, grooms, jittery dogs--we know it all, even if we live seas apart.



London: sequestered houses, slums, pubs,  
two-storied trams, the ritual ParkRides, calling  
cards left on trays at regular visiting days.

And People: upper class, lower cāass, obse-  
quious servers in shops, Bobbies, staid, ever,  
dependable, drunken women in dark alleys, members  
of Parliament, active or the indifferent Lords.

Yes, I could write your English novel without a  
hitch, and you would never know I hadn't put a  
foot on that forsaken land.

1/24/78

by Flora J. Arnstein

It has just occurred to me that perhaps it might be of interest to students of Geratology to have a record from a non-agenarian as experienced from day to day. Not that I intend to write a daily record, but I shall make note of the moods, the changes of stance, the apprehensions as they occur. One reason for my doing this is to escape from the boredom of a restricted life, another is that one cannot talk of these matters to one's kin— it would be unkind and put a burden unwarranted upon them.

Here are things as they stand now. I am 92 and  $\frac{1}{2}$  years old. I am ambulatory, drive a car, and take care of household marketing and the family cooking. These last two occupations seem to be the most I want to undertake, as I find I tire easily, and am not able to take the cat-naps that ~~are~~<sup>maybe</sup> available to my contemporaries. Of these, I might add, only two remain: one, my cousin Erma, a year and a half younger than I, and my sister-in-law, Helen, a year and a half older. The latter is very frail, cannot walk, and is at times confused in her thinking, cannot identify people, and is so deaf that she cannot participate in any social gatherings— which is a sad loss to her, as she has always been a very gregarious person. Erma has always been an eccentric— she will admit of no visitors, says she is a recluse though she will talk at great length over the telephone. But she is a voracious reader and very au fait about politics— reads The Manchester Guardian, and I don't know how many other periodicals and books. She cannot walk but refuses to have a companion, hence falls frequently, and has been hurt quite seriously at times. Helen also refuses a companion, so that she too falls constantly, with somewhat serious results.

The condition of these two contemporaries makes me realize how fortunate I am in being able to function as I do. I conduct two classes, one in poetry, one in short stories— with adults, not children. But I have my lapses and I shall try to define these truthfully. The most disturbing is what I call "lightheadedness"— I cannot describe it otherwise. When this occurs I find walking difficult— not that I fall, but I tend to not exactly totter, but be uncertain of my footing. Then I am subject to my lifetime attacks of colitis, which results in a general feeling of malaise. Recently I called in my doctor, but he said he could find nothing wrong with me— which allayed my worries, but did not better my feeling.

The afternoons are long and tedious. I read most of the time and "polly-anna" myself with the thought that I am able to afford the nursing that L. needs. I found myself unable to handle him alone. He cannot stand and I could not manage to dress him—also the fact that he cannot walk makes it necessary for him to call for someone to fetch and carry for him. I have been fortunate in securing two excellent nurses, who spell each other, and there is the night man who sleeps between L.'s<sup>\*</sup> and my room, undresses him, bathes him and is on call five nights a week. The week-ends he goes out and I have a young boy as "sitter" — a really lovely kid, whom L. has grown very fond of, and who stays till the man comes home—sometimes he stays over night. I knock wood superstitiously at these successful arrangements—also that L. is so patient and uncomplaining—confined as he is.

At my age death is an ever-present thought, though I make strenuous efforts not to focus my mind on it. I am not afraid of death but of dying or being ill and needing care. I have always been so independent that the prospect of having to depend on others for all my needs is somewhat appalling. I do not let my mind dwell on the future—L's or mine, but it does obtrude and requires a special effort to rout it. When one is young one thinks of one's own death as more or less impossible—that is, one doesn't actually think of it very much—but over ninety, well . . . I take an afternoon break for coffee, and the late afternoon drags along until it is time to prepare dinner. I am glad for this occupation—as time-consuming and requiring a certain amount of forethought and preparation. L. is not a fussy eater, but he likes few dishes, and I try to juggle these so that he seems to be getting a variety.

One of the aspects of my position, aside from being a "last leaf on the tree" is that all of my younger associates no longer live in S. F. Therefore when my daughter, Edith says, "Now that you have good nurses why don't you go out more?", I answer "Where to?" Unfortunately I cannot walk any appreciable distance, so that recently when I went to the aquarium in the Park, I came home so exhausted, that I decided such outings were no longer in the cards. I also do not let myself envisage the future as regards L. This, too, calls for a strenuous discipline, as somehow one has the idea that if one can envisage occurrences one can deal better with them, <sup>when they arise</sup> I think this is fallacious reasoning—"sufficient unto the day."

I am especially fortunate in my relation to my grandchildren—Eric paid me the supreme complement the other day when he said, "Granny is a contemporary of all ages."

\* L = Lawrence Arstein



I feel this writing is going to be very salutary for me, even if it has no value as a record. There is something about writing a thing down that puts it in perspective— so that it doesn't keep roiling within one. So I shall try to keep on.

One of the concomitants of age (I hear from others) is that one has difficulty in falling to sleep. I have had this same difficulty but have devised a certain technique for handling it. After an automobile accident which I experienced as a result of taking sedatives, I decided I would no longer make use of them. I then tried to analyse the problem of sleeping. The first thing that came to mind was that the fear of not being able to sleep was a potent element in the difficulty— I remembered then that what triggered the fear was the idea of not being equal to the next day's demands. Further thought convinced me that I was as capable on my days of not sleeping as I was when I had slept. So then it became necessary to eliminate fear. The second matter was that of tension. Trying to relax from the feet up, never worked— by the time I got to my tense forehead, my lower body was again tensed. So I conceived the idea of relaxing <sup>my whole body</sup> ~~all~~ at once, as though by the pull of gravity— and to my surprise, this worked. Then came the most difficult part: one's brain seems to be speeded up, so that thoughts race through one's mind with no let-up. Here I tried various expedients— some akin to what people do when meditating— but this brought no relief. Finally I arrived at the concept of trying to empty one's mind— to stand at the door, <sup>as if</sup> ~~so~~ to speak, and rout all intruders. This, though, is no easy task— thoughts by-pass the guardian and continue to obtrude. Sometimes innumerable efforts are required— but at some point, and one never can know when, one does fall asleep. Actually one never knows one has slept except for the dryness of one's mouth. Old people sleep with their mouths open— I had noticed this in L. long before. I actually became aware I was doing so myself.



Speaking of sleeping, I must have slept ten hours last night. I didn't get up once, as I usually do. Whether the fact that I took a phenobarbital tablet at bed time had something to do with the sleeping, I don't know. (It is only a  $\frac{1}{4}$  grain.) Incidentally, my Dr. tells me I can safely take up to 4 tablets a day— which I rarely do— one tablet seems enough for a stabilizer. Somewhat less lightheaded today. What triggers these spells? I should perhaps record an incident of several years ago. I had driven down town, and felt rather shaky as I left the garage where I had parked. I took an aromatic spirit of ammonia (sort of tablet) out of my purse and breathed it up, but with no results. I went into a store for some purchases, and then proceeded down Henry Street on the way to my hair-dressers. Halfway down the block I became somewhat disoriented— the street, the buildings all looked unfamiliar, and then I had the sensation that I might fall. I held on to a lamp-post and presently two women carrying a chair came out of a street-level store, and sat me down. I asked had I fainted, they said no, but that I seemed to need help. They urged me to go home, but I felt I couldn't drive so they called a taxi. Shortly before reaching home I felt normal again, but called my Dr. When he came he said I may have had a slight stroke, but need not be concerned unless I had more. I have never had another— but sometimes I am apprehensive that these "lightheaded" spells may be the prelude to one. Chiefly I am fearful that I may not be available for L. who depends on me to a great degree.

I should, perhaps, note how L.'s aging differs from mine. For one thing, he is low-keyed and never apprehensive— even though he has had two heart attacks. He is always optimistic, except when he recalls some situation of the past, in which he felt incompetent. It seems impossible to "lay this ghost." He tells me he dreams about it constantly. I tell him that he should think of all the honors bestowed upon him— his room is filled with framed tributes to his work as "Mr. Public Health." Also he has memory lapses— these vary from day to day. Curiously he forgets immediate things— matters that have to do with his every day life, whereas he seems to remember well when he talks with his friends (doctors) of health matters, or politics. It seems a strange phenomenon that he consistently forgets peoples' names. I do, too, and my aging friends acknowledge that they are plagued with this loss. I find that when I am asked names suddenly, I cannot have access to them— the same occurs at times when I am looking for a certain word. Memory seems very selective always, but more so when one grows old.

Hickory

I crowed too soon yesterday— Actually I had one of the worst <sup>lightheadedness</sup> <sup>CU</sup> I have ever had. Since I don't feel this while sitting, I misjudged my ability to walk, and when I got to the shopping district, found I was very unsteady. West Portal, where I do my marketing, is bisected with a curb running through the center of the street. I had great difficulty negotiating the curb— at one point wondered whether I should give up the shopping and go home. But there were so many commodities I needed that I determined to keep going— besides, I have, maybe, too much of a false pride to let myself avoid things.

In the afternoon I had my short-story group. As we were sitting around taking tea— after our discussion was over, I asked two members how they felt about aging. One is over seventy, I know, the other I assume about that age. Both said they dreaded most senility, as well as <sup>being</sup> dependent on others. I may hazard a guess that these are the concerns of most older people.

Six months before she died Imogene Cunningham <sup>ham</sup> came here to take L.B. and my <sup>C</sup> pictures for a book she was writing about the "Over Nineties." She said, "How do you feel ~~as~~ over ninety?" I said, "Not too differently than I did previously, except that I fatigue too readily." She said (and I think she was over <sup>2</sup> ninety herself,) "I just hate it. I have vertigo, and hate that."

I imagine there are as many different reactions to aging, as there are people aging. The fact is, one isn't a different person, though perhaps personality traits become more pronounced with the advancing years. I somewhat resent, however, people catering to my age. People are always jumping up to prevent what I am doing — in this regard I feel there should be more respect accorded the elderly. Of course I know the motive for helping is a kindly one, but I do not think help should be imposed unless requested. Last night, as opposed to the night before, I had difficulty sleeping— though I imagine I slept more than I think I did. It was one of those "gassy" nights. I <sup>had</sup> asked my Dr. whether there was something wrong with my body chemistry. He said, "Not necessarily— the gas may result from sluggish peristalsis."

One — attribute of old age, maybe, I think, garrulousness. I wonder sometimes about myself— whether I don't run off the track too often.

I know I am somewhat repetitive — My kindly friends and family tell me so. This has to do with faulty memory— and so far I can't find any remedy for it.



After three days of being plagued by lightheadedness, it has be<sup>en</sup> borne in upon me that in all likelihood I shall have more frequent occurrences of this discomfort from now on. If this is to be the case, it seems the better part of wisdom to arrive at some "creative" (though the term is too pretentious) way to adjust to the situation. I seem to have arrived at some partial method of handling it. For some time I have known that to change from a recumbent position to a sitting one without distress, one must move slowly— sit for a moment or two before walking. Now I find that if I apply somewhat the same procedure, I can mitigate the shakiness— I find I must turn slowly, both my head as well as my body in going from one position to another; this applies particularly to rising from a bending or stooping ~~position~~ position. The trick is going to be to remember this. I am wondering now, whether the discomforts of old age can be subjected to an analysis that can help one in making adjustments. Perhaps the difference, or one of them, from youth to old age, is that in youth one makes these adjustments unconsciously, whereas in age one must handle them from a conscious level. In any case I think that these conscious attempts are fruitful, and I shall try to apply them as long as I am in control of my thinking.

One of the discomforts, and least amenable to control, is that of getting up from the floor, if one has had to get down to retrieve something. Knees seem to have lost their flexibility, and one needs something to hold on to with one's hands to become erect. But even this is not always at hand— so I have found that to turn over face down and lift one's self from that position is possible.

In my early years I used to make occasional use of the phrase, "growing old gracefully," which represents a concept that I think no older could endorse. In fact the word gracefully, seems singularly inappropriate. There is little grace in having to submit to mounting restrictions—the only grace involved might be to keep one's protests to one's self.

When I was a girl I read Oliver Wendell Holmes' book, (I think it was called) Over the Teacups. Why a certain statement ~~made~~ in it should have made such an impression on me, I would find hard to account for. It went something to the effect: "Nature is kind to one. If one cannot run when one is old, she has ordered that one does not want to run." This is another fallacy—(why are there so many related to aging?) I should like to be able to walk enough to go to galleries, or to other places of interest—it is no kindness of nature that comes to my rescue, as compensatory. Yeats rebelled violently about his age—in one case he likened his condition to that of a dog with a tin can tied to its tail. Dylan Thomas admonishes his father in the poem Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night, saying that "Old age should burn and rave at close of day." His poem is ambivalent to a certain degree in that he designates the night as "good," still the burden of the poem is "Rage, rage, against the dying of the light."

I think that perhaps there are few <sup>young</sup> people who can realize the implications of age. I know of myself <sup>when young</sup> that I reacted, say to an elderly person's difficulty in getting on or off a car, as though he or she were a character in a theater cast of characters: An Old Man.

I think that the only reasonable attitude toward's one's aging is to accept it without protest. I have to think of a saying of my grandmother's, "Ken Mann might alt. . . no, I cannot remember the German, but translated, it says, "If one doesn't want to grow old, one must allow one's self to be shot while young." Whatever philosophy one eventually arrives at one has to realize that all life is more or less a question of happenstance—they say character determines fate, but there are a lot of other determinants—circumstances, environment, tradition etc.etc.

I have an aging friend <sup>living</sup> in what is probably the best retirement home in this state. There are only ~~the~~ ground floor <sup>each</sup> room or suite has its own little garden, and the grounds are most beautifully landscaped. The furnishings are tasteful, and the service excellent. There is a main building, a semi-invalid house and an infirmary. My friend has moved



from the first mentioned to the last progressively, as her arthritic condition has worsened. To me, despite the advantages, the place is something of a horror. One is confronted on all sides with people in various stages of aging—some senile, some lethargic, some in walkers, some in wheel-chairs. But for a person situated as my friend, there is no alternative place that could afford her the care, the meals, and some recreation, if she were able to take advantage of it. She has her own furnishings, a room of her own, a garden outlook. She has no immediate family any longer, except one nephew who lives in the southern part of the state, and his son, a medical student who is doing his internship at Fresno. I am her only more or less steady visitor. But I find, to my sorrow, that our visits have lost the old-time lively interchange. We neither have much to bring from the outside world and the range of subject matter that we can discuss is necessarily limited. Lately she has not been able to read a great deal—though formerly she was an avid reader and I find that after an hour's visiting she seems tired and yawns so I get up and go. I feel deeply depressed after each visit. Her suffering is depicted in her looks—she has grown very thin, there are sometimes deep violet depressions below her eyes, and though she is uncomplaining it is heart-rending to see her walk—with a wheeled walker she can only inch forward.

What is there to be said for an old age such as hers? Or Helen's. Suffering, deprivation, a cruel ending to lives that have been devoted to community contributions. These are the bleak thoughts that cannot be diverted by any sort of optimism. I am committed, in this writing, to be honest, so the unhappy reactions cannot be glossed over or omitted. (I have, somehow, overlooked the fact that both these women have means so that they can afford care—what happens to those old folk who haven't?)

I have become aware of the somewhat radical changes in how I feel from day to day. I don't know whether this is characteristic of aging or whether in youth one has these changes but is not conscious of them. I remember a term my mother used to employ when speaking of the looks of a person: "She is very 'journaliere', by which she implied that some days <sup>a person</sup> ~~was~~ was better looking than on others. However that may be, today I am fairly steady on my feet, as against the last few days when I was not. I see these variations in L. as well as in myself. For a while when we went driving he would say, "I haven't the vaguest notion of where we are." Last week when we drove to the dentist's he said, "It's funny, but I know now just where we are, while a little time ago, I would never tell." At the same time that he had this awakened awareness, he repeated the remark three or four times.

Jan. 30-

-2-

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To go back to the matter of changing ability, there are certain accompaniments to this state that are definitely associated with age. These are psychological. When I am in an unfavorable state, I am inclined to think, "Well, this is it!" "Probably from now on, I'll feel this way." The fact that up to now, these states have been temporary, does not seem to enter into my reckoning. I seem prepared to accept non-functioning as inevitable. —(which of course it more or less is, but not necessarily of the moment.)

Jan. 31-

I have observed about myself, that though I have some desire to be foot-loose, I am not altogether averse to staying at home most of the time. Whether this is a neurotic symptom—that one feels somehow safer within one's own four walls, or whether this is an attribute of old age, I don't know. I remember that when my mother died, she and my father were living in a rather large apartment. After her death I asked my father's doctor whether it might not be wise to move him to a smaller apartment, one which would not at every turn recall my mother to him, and also where he would not rattle around in so much space. The doctor said "No." He thought it a mistake to move old people, that they are better off in familiar surroundings. I am wondering whether gerontologists take cognizance of this fact, whether it is valid or not.

Feb. 1-

Since I am interested in the psychology of aging, I will note some changes that seem to have taken place in my thinking. I don't know whether people at large do much fantasizing, but I seem in the past to have fantasied considerably. In contrast to this I do little, if any, today. Whether this is related to the fact that in youth one envisages many years ahead, in which desired happenings may transpire, as against age, when there are neither many years to look forward to, as well as few goals that seem reasonable or desirable, I don't know. I still write poetry, however, which activity may be equated with fantasizing. In any case, my poems seem to explore aging, or not explore it, contain implied reference to it—as follows

Any ladder means "rise"—  
As Jacob knew,  
I plant my foot on the lowest slat,  
Under my hands the rounded wood  
Gives confidence. I step  
From one rung to the next.

How far is paradise?  
The topmost rung  
Shows me a world of space,  
But what I need, is intimations—

Do I go out in daylight as the stars,  
And reappear at night to hearten  
doubters?



Feb. 1-

-10-

244

I seem to have stressed so far two negative aspects of aging- (A Freudian slip: I type 'again' for aging frequently.) For me there is one positive aspect, though reference to it may sound as vainglory. I find myself much less critical of others, than I used to be. Having lived long enough to see what changes people are capable of, also how circumstances often force people into certain characteristics, <sup>behavior</sup> I now feel that people are much less responsible for their behavior than I formerly believed. Not that I subscribe to, "Tout savoir c'est tout pardonner;" it is only that I do not think it the province of anyone to pardon anyone else. We all have our failings, our blind spots, and it is charitable, I think, to concede that others have them without <sup>then</sup> incurring criticism. At the same time (though this may be to my discredit) I do not seem to have found any overall purpose <sup>to</sup> life. This being the case, I find that such terms as "right," and "wrong" are purely relative. Values seem determined by sociological concepts, and vary with <sup>time</sup> place, heritage, etc.. Is this reason <sup>for</sup> the basis of "existentialism?"

When my mind hangs loose  
It wanders seaward,  
Not for journeying, for the heft of wave,  
The sough of sand, and for the line  
So strictly drawn of sea and sky.

What lures? Land-stranded,  
I rode the sea but twice, and then  
It seemed diminished,  
No lavish spread of waters.

In childhood I annexed the sea,  
Ran barefoot on the bubble-scalloped shore,  
Withstood the breakers,  
Sought salty shells, the sand-strewn  
Fish, even sea-gulls lifeless, wings athwart-

All these made up a sea  
Of myth,  
Stored secretly to rise again  
When aging limbs forbade  
All wandering but the mind's.

A prime example of PMA was indicated to me by a remark L. made yesterday. He was trying to get the boy who drives him to take him to see a friend living on the peninsula. I asked why do you want to see him? You told me your last visit was so dull. "Well," he said, "he is old, I probably won't see him much longer." Actually he is more than ten years younger than L! who is 95.

Since I am recording various aspects of aging, I might note the bodily changes that I have undergone for the last few years. I have lost weight— weigh now, dressed, in the neighborhood of 100 pounds. In my "prime" I weighed as much as 130 lbs. The loss has been chiefly in my upper body. My chest shows my ribs, my arms are scrawny; my lower body, my legs, have not changed— they are shapely as they always were. Of course my hair is whitening— not so quickly as I like— the salt and pepper is less attractive than white. Also I have lost all hair on my legs and under my arms. For a while my arms grew heavily haired, but are now thinning out. None of the changes disturb me in any way.

A proper of day-to-day changes in behavior patterns, to which I have earlier referred, I found in my friend who lives in the retirement home, a remarkable change yesterday. She was suddenly more sprightly, interested in political affairs( the Panama Canal matter) also in my daughter's (she drove me down) activities— various aspects of teaching— spoke of her condition, of the other patients in the infirmary, and at length of her grand-niece who is studying in England. When my daughter asked her what she most liked to do, she said rather ruefully, get into bed. Her doctor has given her no hope of an amelioration of her condition, and I noticed that her right hand was becoming<sup>g</sup>crippled as is her left. How to account for this change in her? Perhaps the stimulus of a new visitor (my daughter) had something to do with it.

Feb. 3— Yesterday I asked Dr. Burnham, (who comes every two weeks to give L. a shot) how he accounts for the variability in elderly people from day to day. He said it is a matter of circulation— when the blood (or enough) goes to the head the person functions more normally.

By the strangest of coincidences, (I am beginning to wonder whether these occurrences are coincidences, since I have had many of such occur during my life) I came across, in straightening certain books in L's room, a book by Dr. Russell V. Lee called NO GRAY ON THIS VEST, and as subtitle The Art of Growing Old in Style. It is a delightful book, brimming with life and optimism, written when he was 61 years old. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, he deals with many of the same items as I have dealt with in this record, the only difference (no there are others) is that he ~~is~~ is an extrovert, as against myself, who am an introvert. Nevertheless he has much to say that is valuable to me, chiefly the importance PMA, which stands for "proper mental attitude."

I think I have assumed in relation to age, an improper mental attitude— that of dwelling too much on the disadvantages of age and of absolving myself from activities that would be beneficial to me. I shall try to adopt a better PMA.



I have finished Dr. Lee's book. It is somewhat repetitive (he says that the aged are guilty of this fault, and includes himself.) He takes up a matter that I was about to comment on in relation to myself. I have found that I do not savor things as ardently as I used to, and he mentions the same thing of himself. Perhaps this bears out Dr. Holmes' saying— one doesn't regret being denied experiences as they do not have the "clout" they formerly had. I cannot, however, account for the fact that I do not care to listen to music any more. I can't attribute this reaction to age, as it has been of some long duration. I did notice that when I began to write poetry, at the age of 40 or thereabouts I could spend any amount of time writing, without realizing its passage, while I was conscious that in practising or playing music I was a "clock-watcher." But considering the fact that all my youth and a great part of my early married life was devoted to music, I am at a loss to know why even listening to music is distasteful to me. I can't relate this to any trauma, or any discernible cause.

This record, which I am writing, will doubtless be terminated shortly— after all when one has touched on all one's available material about aging, there is little left but repetitiveness. There is more to be said about certain emoluments that age brings — perhaps a greater balance of outlook, and whatever advantage accrues from having observed people through different ages— children growing up, changing, adults changing sometimes fantastically, mores changing, language changing, a whole welter of life that only the old have access to. My next obligation (to myself) is to find some occupation, some interest which will be stimulating— I thank Dr. Lee for this admonishment.

It is almost a year and a half since my last entry. Much has changed since then. First, my only two contemporaries have died - the last of my vintage except my husband and myself. My husband's condition also has changed. We now need nurses around the clock for him, inasmuch as he cannot walk or stand alone, and I am no longer able to hold him up. He is, mercifully, not suffering, but is bored with his confinement, still he maintains an optimistic outlook. My own varies from day to day. I am less addicted to "light-headedness," but am no longer able to walk any distance. The consequence is that I am almost as house-bound as my husband, except for my morning marketing and small errands in the vicinity of my home. I still do the cooking, and write when the spirit moves me. I had a run of story-writing a few weeks ago - wrote 22 Vignettes in as many days. Then I was suddenly turned off. My eldest grandson, a very intelligent man, when I told him of this asked, "What came up in your life that could have blocked you?" At first I couldn't think of anything, then suddenly it dawned on me that I had begun two vignettes that I couldn't finish. One did have to do with a painful event in my life, the other presented too long and involved a narrative for me to want to tackle. I have had three such writing impulses in my life. The one relating to poetry, has continued on and off for all these years. In fact I am now writing poems that deal with my changing attitude toward my life today. The other was a run of a week, in which I wrote ten stories, and the last was the above mentioned.

Have done with self, this self,  
 Confined in verse, masked in prose-  
 It dogs me like a shadow with no sun-  
 I tear it from me in stripped skin,  
 Bloodless from too long bleeding; -  
 I shell it out from between ribs,  
 A sodden mass, a breath gone hard.

Now have I done? There in my glass  
 Are still the bones, the skeleton  
 Is me, no other. And the cranium?  
 All this destruction useless-  
 The merry Self goes on, thru cells, thru cells,  
 All crying I, Me. I, Me-  
 Will only death drown this,  
 Is there no other ruidance?

(over)

No transmigr<sup>ation</sup> for me,  
 Yet I have lived a hundred lives,  
 From the square toad, to battle-horse,  
 Baker kneading cross-buns,  
 A small boy arrowing for the splat,  
 Seff, criminal, saint in tarnished halo,  
 Fireman, nurse, what have you?

All of me circumscribed:  
 Woman, wife and mother,  
 Yet in my secret self the searcher,  
 Wanderer on forbidden paths,  
 Ruler of rain-bows,  
 Fisher of depths -  
 Who binds me while there are worlds  
 To explore?

---

The "today" is to be dealt with,  
 No plans ahead,  
 Peeling the resistant carrots,  
 Mopping the indifferent floor,  
 Or buying cutlets or fowl  
 From cases that might house a mummy.

Only the egg-plant lures,  
 Regal in purple, glossy and crived  
 As any Grecian urn. My hands slide  
 Over it, in pret st<sup>e</sup>, its tinge of sugar,  
 Pulpy pulp.

What humans pass me  
 Fade into one another  
 As screen pictures whose passions  
 Are sieved, whose deaths  
 Black-out to streets.

Who ring my door to share a common tea?  
 Enclosed in cellophane, impervious  
 I stand, walk, sit, waiting for what?

Yesterday I read this paper to my daughter, who is a professor of literature at Merritt College in Oakland. I think I wanted her collaboration of whether it was worthy of showing to you. I had not read it before to her, in pursuance of my earlier remark of not wanting to burden my ~~kind~~ with my difficulties— ( she told me, though, after I <sup>had</sup> read it, that I had already mentioned some of the items to her.) She made two criticisms, as follows: First, she said I mention my changes of mood during a day— she said the reader would ask what these moods are? In answer, they range for moments of "silent desperation," to moments of slight disorientation - (not remembering why I had opened a certain closet, what I was looking for) to a certain stability which I recognize at the time may be only temporary. Of the desperation, I have begun to feel that it is in some way related to my physical malfunctioning— at times when I have colitis or a mild gastritis I tend to become somewhat pessimistic, though I think my dominant feeling has always been one of optimism.

The other criticism relates to the fact that the general conception of aging is a loss of intellectual powers, and that evidence of this not necessarily occurring is worthy of mention. As a matter of fact, she instanced that she had been talking to me of the problem of teaching her young students the difference in concept between tragedy and pathos, and that she had introduced them to Aristotle's theory of purgation by pity and fear, which they found difficult to comprehend. I had argued that I had never myself been convinced of the validity of the observation of tragedy leading to either of these two, and she, also, confessed that she agreed to it only in part. She further made reference to my reading, which I have just touched upon in passing. I read in the field of belles lettres, psychology, and only those novels which by virtue of style or content, seem to touch life in depth. I find that I read today with much more discrimination than I did in the past— rereading novels I read earlier, I discern much more in them than I did previously. Also in my writing, what I once did unconsciously and spontaneously, without objective criteria, I now do with a more conscious awareness— in fact I have come to think that despite writing poetry since my fortieth year, I am now only beginning to be aware of all that is involved.

I wonder if this (above) additional comment throws any further light on the aging process— at least it has validity as far as I am concerned.



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